

1998

## **Stakeholders' voices : A socio-cultural approach to describing and extending an understanding of primary education in Mauritius**

Michelle Griffiths  
*Edith Cowan University*

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Stakeholders' Voices : A Socio-cultural  
Approach To Describing and Extending  
An Understanding Of Primary Education  
In Mauritius

Michelle Griffiths  
Edith Cowan University

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**STAKEHOLDERS' VOICES:  
A SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH TO  
DESCRIBING AND EXTENDING AN UNDERSTANDING OF  
PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MAURITIUS**

by

**Michelle Griffiths**  
**MEd (Manchester)**

**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of**  
**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University**

1998



## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

This study describes and expands an understanding of primary education in one developing country, Mauritius. The need for the study was argued from a review of literature which brought to notice the lack of social action perspectives in analysis of education in and about developing countries and the necessity and importance of knowing about the reality of schooling in developing countries.

The research was conceptualised as a socio-cultural approach. It gave analytical priority to the actions, experiences and perceptions of teachers, pupils, parents and educationists in order to create an account of what Mauritian education was like and meant to individuals involved in or closely associated with Mauritian primary educational processes and functionings. The research was conceptualised on the premise that, as a social construction, Mauritian primary education was to be understood in its social milieu but also was located and had to be understood in the broader context of national and global circumstances, influences and pressures. The research can be taken as an attempt to integrate micro and macro levels of analysis.

Data was collected in Mauritius over a period of four months, for the most part in two primary schools and also in participants' places of work and homes and methods were triangulated to ensure validity. They comprised: (a) observation to describe people and educational settings and to document school routines and processes; (b) in-depth interviews to elicit participants' constructs and document the issues and priorities they brought to their understanding of Mauritian primary education and; (c) stories and drawings to elicit pupils' own views. Data analysis has been emergent and inductive and the research findings were presented through diverse instrumental short case studies. The findings of the study showed that Mauritian primary education was construed by participant stakeholders as a means to an end, a credential enabling the achievement of a

cultural aspiration for individual social upgrading and to succeed at an examination Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) which put pupils in competition to rank for a restricted number of 'good' secondary colleges. The findings highlighted teacher-centered instructional methods, the valuing of encyclopedic knowledge, hard work and uniformity and the practices of 'ability privileging' and 'differential treatment' of pupils as prominent characteristics of Mauritian primary education. They also revealed a polarisation between the 'official' intent of Mauritian primary education and their realisation at school level with regard to educational opportunity and the degree to which Mauritian primary education promoted and provided the appropriate attitudes, skills and knowledge for individuals and for the social and economic good of the nation. The study concluded asserting that the research exemplified a conceptual and theoretical approach that may be replicated for collecting rich micro data, useful for pursuing a quality agenda for basic education in developing countries. The study has provided an illustration of the interactions between context, educational processes and the ways in which primary education was experienced by participant stakeholders. It has also located Mauritian primary education within the framework of international educational ideals and principles. In doing so, the study has served to remind that one way of looking at education is to see it as a developmental undertaking that should serve childrens' immediate as well as future interests and has brought to light foundational and detailed information about Mauritian educational processes that could be useful for educational change trying to achieve a developmental objective in Mauritius.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education ;
2. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
3. contain any defamatory material.

Signature

Date 25/5/98

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many people have contributed to the development of this thesis and have assisted me at various points over the last three years. I am very grateful to the members of my supervisory team, Dr Bruce Haynes from the School of Educational and Social Inquiry, Dr Nancy Hudson-Rodd and Dr Jim Wicks from the Centre for Development Studies who gave me continued encouragement, advice and support throughout the duration of the research. I am also very grateful to Professor Terry Morrison, UNESCO Chair in Education at the Mauritius Institute of Education, who coordinated the field work in Mauritius and whose support and advice made that phase successful.

This study would not have been possible without the assistance of many Mauritians. In particular I would like to thank Dr Sheila Bunwaree and Dr Vicram Ramarai. Their many kindnesses made my stays in Mauritius enjoyable and fruitful. I am also greatly indebted to Associate Professor Cader Kalla, Associate Professor Devi Dayal and other staff from the Mauritius Institute of Education, to individuals from the Mauritian Examination Syndicate, the Roman Catholic Education Authority and to officials from the Ministry of Education from whom I received a great deal of help. I also would like to thank Arlette Bazire for her hospitality and Danièle for helping with the transcribing. I extend my thanks to the pupils, teachers, parents and educationists who participated in the study. The research was made possible and pleasurable through and because of their participation.

I also extend my thanks to my colleagues at Edith Cowan University from whom I learnt so much and for their friendship.

I thank Edith Cowan University for providing a scholarship which enabled me to concentrate on my studies and the International and Community Affairs Division of Edith Cowan University for providing financial support for the fieldwork in Mauritius.

Finally I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Joe Griffiths for his patience, his understanding and enduring support throughout.

Michelle Griffiths  
January 1998  
Perth, Western Australia

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

<b>CPE:</b>	<b>Certificate of Primary Education</b>
<b>DHT:</b>	<b>Deputy Head Teacher</b>
<b>EPZ:</b>	<b>Export Processing Zone</b>
<b>EVS:</b>	<b>Environmental Studies</b>
<b>GIA:</b>	<b>Grant-in Aid</b>
<b>HAA:</b>	<b>Hindu Aided Authority</b>
<b>HSC:</b>	<b>Higher School Certificate</b>
<b>HT:</b>	<b>Head Teacher</b>
<b>IMF:</b>	<b>International Monetary Fund</b>
<b>IVTB:</b>	<b>Industrial Vocational Training Board</b>
<b>MEPD:</b>	<b>Ministry of Economic Planning and Development</b>
<b>MES:</b>	<b>Mauritius Examination Syndicate</b>
<b>MFPA:</b>	<b>Mauritius Family Planning Association</b>
<b>MGI:</b>	<b>Mahatma Gandhi Institute</b>
<b>MIE:</b>	<b>Mauritius Institute of Education</b>
<b>MMM:</b>	<b>Mouvement Militant Mauricien</b>
<b>PSC:</b>	<b>Public Service Commission</b>
<b>PSLC:</b>	<b>Primary School Leaving Certificate</b>
<b>PSM:</b>	<b>Parti Socialiste Mauricien</b>
<b>PSSC:</b>	<b>Private Secondary Schools Authority</b>
<b>PTA:</b>	<b>Parents Teachers Association</b>
<b>RCEA:</b>	<b>Roman Catholic Education Authority</b>
<b>SC:</b>	<b>School Certificate</b>
<b>STD:</b>	<b>Standard</b>

**TEC: Tertiary Education Commission**

**UNDP: United Nations Development Programme**

**UPSEE: Union of Private Secondary Education Employees**

**UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this research I used a socio-cultural approach which brought school level processes and the view-points of a broad range of participant stakeholders into focus in order to describe and extend an understanding of primary education in one developing country, Mauritius.

In using this approach, the research gave analytical priority to the actions, experiences and perceptions of teachers, parents, pupils and educationists, to create an account of what Mauritian primary education was like and meant to individuals involved in or closely associated with Mauritian primary educational processes. The research was conceptualised on the premise that, as a social construction and social phenomenon, Mauritian primary education was embedded and to be understood in its social milieu but also was located and to be understood in the broader context of national and global circumstances, influences and pressures. This research integrates micro and macro levels of analysis, exemplifies a socio-cultural approach and qualitative research methods that highlight and bring the "actions" and "voices" of participant stakeholders into an understanding of educational processes and issues in 'developing countries'.

This chapter briefly introduces the Mauritian context, outlines the background and rationale that instigated this research and states the purpose of the study. It provides a brief outline of the research methods and a clarification of terms and key concepts. It also provides a detailed outline of the steps taken to conduct ethical research, presents

the specific questions which guided this research and a discussion of the significance of the study. Lastly, the content of remaining chapters is delineated.

## **The Mauritian context<sup>1</sup>**

Mauritius, comprising the main island of Mauritius, the islands of Rodrigues, Agalega, St Brandon and a number of outlying islets, is a small nation (1840 square kilometres) located just north of the Tropic of Capricorn in the West Indian Ocean, some 800 kilometres east of Madagascar. In 1995 the total population of Mauritius was estimated at 1.1 million and its population average growth rate at 1.3% (World Development Report, 1997, p.221).

Mauritius has no indigenous population. The present inhabitants are descendants of settlers from Europe, of slaves from Africa (West Africa, Mozambique and Madagascar) and of indentured labourers and artisans from Asia (Indian peninsula and China). Formerly a French colony (1767-1810), Mauritius became a British possession in 1810, gained its independence in 1968 and became a Republic in 1992.

Since independence and after an initial period of poverty, high unemployment, unsustainable population growth and dependence on a mono-crop sugar economy, the Mauritian economy has been diversified to include a textile industry with the creation of an active Export Processing Zone (EPZ) and an international tourism industry. With a GNP per capita of \$3,380, Mauritius is currently ranked as a middle level economy by the World Bank (World Development Report, 1997).

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter Five provides a detailed analysis of the Mauritian socio-cultural and educational circumstances and patterns as they have evolved over time.

The history of education in Mauritius is one of gradual expansion of educational provision for a select group during the colonial periods, to a present system including children of all socio-economic classes, sex and ethnic origin. 96% of Mauritian children are enrolled in primary school for 6 years, 47% of primary entrants proceed to secondary schooling, while the tertiary enrolment remains at a low 2.2%. Tertiary enrolment is low by comparison with Fiji's tertiary enrolment which stands at 12%, that of Barbados at 17%, that of Malaysia at 7.2%, and that of Thailand at 15.7% (United Nations Development Programme, (UNDP) 1994).

Schooling in Mauritius is based on the 6+5+2 system inherited from Britain. This system includes six years of primary education leading to the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), followed by five years of secondary education leading to the Cambridge School Certificate (SC) or the General Certificate of Education (GCE) 'O' Level and a further two years leading to the Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) or 'A' Level Examination.

In 1996, primary education was provided in 281 primary schools, 220 of which were government run. Of the non-government schools, 51 Roman Catholic and two Hindu were government aided and the rest were privately run (Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD), 1997b). In 1977, education was made non-fee paying at all levels and became compulsory in 1991, for every one between the ages of five to 12 years. Pupils enter Standard I at the age of five and take the CPE examination after six years of schooling. Promotion is automatic and there is no provision for special education for less able pupils. Each year approximately 45% of pupils, some for the second time, fail to pass the CPE examination (MEPD, 1997a). In addition to being

used as a certification, this examination is also used to rank pupils for access to places in the more highly rated secondary schools. Many pupils retake the CPE to secure a better ranking and thus gain access to better secondary schools. The majority of pupils in the upper grades of primary schooling take private tuition to improve their performance in this highly competitive examination

Mauritian pupils learn up to three languages in primary school: English, French and an ancestral language. There is a choice between Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu, Cantonese and Mandarin. English, which is the medium of instruction and French are compulsory from first grade, while the ancestral or oriental language, as it is known in Mauritius, is optional. Nearly 70% of the pupils study an oriental language (MEPD, 1997a). The other subjects taught at the primary level include mathematics, environmental studies (EVS), creative education and physical education.

### **Background and rationale of the study**

A literature review shows that detailed and concrete information about school level processes and thinking is lacking in educational research in and about developing countries (Ball, 1981; Little, 1988, 1995; Watson & Oxenham, 1985; Wright, 1988; Jones & Bhalwantar, 1990; King, 1991; Vulliamy, Lewin & Stephens, 1990; Crossley & Bennett, 1997. Crossley and Vulliamy (1997) for example note that: "... for various historical and cultural reasons, educational research in such countries has to date been dominated by positivist strategies" (p.13), while Jones and Bhalwantar (1990) note that: "there is more prescription than description available about the scenarios within classrooms of developing countries" (p. 176).

In recent years, researchers of educational systems and processes in developing countries have emphasised the importance of knowing about the reality of school level processes and functionings. Drawing on educational studies in China, Cheng Kai-ming (1997) for example, argues that because of national differences and because education is a process, "statistical indicators, ["mathematical models" usually utilised in macro studies of education] are rarely meaningful for national policy making unless the underlying educational processes are also revealed and studied", adding that because they do not take into account emerging trends (not yet significant mathematically) "mathematical models" utilised to analyse education especially in policy research may "soon become obsolete" (pp.72-73).

Cheng Kai-ming (1997) and Dzwimbo (1994) remark that much educational research in developing countries is funded and dominated by development agencies such as the World Bank. In the context of Africa, Dzwimbo, for example, argues that the quantitative research paradigms utilised in such agency's designs "do not allow for the examination of how pupils and teachers give meaning to their world" (1994, p. 98), while Cheng Kai-ming (1997), on his part, cites the report made by an international consultancy team sent by a funding agency "to look at basic education in a poor province in China", remarking that none of their findings with regards to school attendance "reflected field experience but the report admitted that these were estimations based upon models that had yielded effective results in Latin America!" (p. 74).

Per Dalin (1994) notes that: "governments in lesser developed countries and donor organizations with an agenda of supporting educational change programmes in these

countries, have little research to guide their practice". The main purpose of Dalin's study was to describe and analyse the change process at the national and local level in Colombia, Ethiopia and Bangladesh. This study, an international research project, took a qualitative approach based on earlier work by Mathew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (1984). Among other findings it came to the following conclusions with regard to educational research in developing countries:

- Educational reform is a local process. The school is the centre of change, not the ministry or the district administration. Schools determine the degree of success, they can block implementation, enfeeble it, or bring it to effective life. For schools to improve the quality of their programmes effectively, they need to play an active and creative role.
- Focus on classroom practice. The clue is to focus on the dynamics of the classroom and the individual school, since these dynamics to a large extent determine implementation success (Dalin, 1994, p. xvii-xviii).

In their recent study on factors determining *The quality of schools in different development contexts*, Carron & Ta Ngoc Châu (1996) note that, for many developing countries the new challenges are not merely provision of schooling but also to supply quality education that corresponds to the needs of the people. They claim that in order to achieve this quality agenda: "It no longer suffices merely to analyse national averages ... the specific ways in which schools operate in their varied contexts have to be understood" (p. xii). They base their research on the hypothesis that the understanding of "the real problems of the functioning of educational institutions requires that they be



analysed within the local context where they occur" (1996, p.5).

All these recent studies point to the fact that educational research in developing nations, if it is to be realistic as well as useful, needs to incorporate in-depth-descriptions and analyses of school level educational processes and practices and needs to see schools as centres for gathering educational information and promoting educational change. These recent studies also point to the fact that qualitative methodologies are useful for gathering realistic data not only for the country studied in its attempt to reform but also as a contribution to international comparative educational research and theory.

For Michael Crossley and Graham Vulliamy (1997), the strengths of qualitative research strategies reside in their "ecological validity"; "appropriateness for the study of processes and innovations"; "emphasis upon chalk face realities of schooling with studies of classroom processes and teachers' and students' perspective"; "ability to probe the policy/practice interface"; "usefulness in supplementing quantitative research by adding depth to breadth" (p.13).

A literature review about education in developing countries also brought to notice the fact that questions and answers about the place of education for individual achievement for the most part are given by some people on behalf of other people. Answers are, for the most part given by theorists, researchers, policy makers at national or international level but they rarely incorporate the words and meanings as well as the expression of wants and priorities of pupils, parents, teachers and other people close to educational processes. By comparison with other countries, for example, very little is known of the ways in which children experience and view their education, or the ways in which

parents live and construe the education of their children in developing countries.

Edmund King (1973) substantiates the need to take these aspects into account when he states:

In the long run, it is the personal appreciation of what education means for me that makes my schooling effective or useless. Likewise, the provision of schooling that is effective or attractive ... depends on upon the subjective judgement of the students and their parents –no matter how skillfully social scientists and administrators attempt to predict and provide ... we need widely based judgement by specialist colleagues in other fields and by all participants in the enterprise of education. Without that concurrence education becomes something else and loses its effectiveness (p.34).

This statement brings an additional dimension to the fore. Not only is there a need to incorporate the voices of “participants in the enterprise of education”, there is also a need to incorporate these voices into a broad base in recognition of their diversity and multiplicity. This notion is taken up as a theoretical orientation for this research and is further explained in Chapter Three. Thomson (1981) illustrates this need through a metaphor in which he likens education to a football.

We should remember that we educationists are not the only players on the field who are kicking it and that other players, politicians, economists, parents, pupils and others, may be seeking to kick in other directions. What actually happens to the ball will depend however not simply upon who kicks it or who stops it, but also upon the direction of the wind, the slope of the field and the length of the grass (Thomson, 1981, p. 21).

Thomson goes on to say that the “wind” represents “the general current of change within society”, “the slope of the field” may represent “the availability of resource” and the “long grass” represents “factors of inertia” (Thomson, 1981, p. 22). This ingenious metaphor not only indicates that multiple deliberations and interests are at play in regard

to education. It also indicates that, just as they exist in a game of football, these deliberations and interests exist at different levels within and around the education field.

## **What of Mauritius?**

In Mauritius, research about primary education is conducted at the macro level and concerned with system wide features and examination results rather than processes and participants' meanings<sup>2</sup>. As in most developing countries questions and answers about the place of primary education for individual and national development are asked and answered in terms of inputs, end product and functions rather than processes.

Interpretive research evidence of the realities of Mauritian primary schooling is yet to emerge as there are no ethnographic or other academic qualitative studies showing the interactions and practices in Mauritian primary school settings, or illuminating how pupils, teachers and other concerned parties experience and understand primary education in their lives and particular contexts.

A reading of the Mauritian press, however, leaves readers in no doubt that multiple "voices" exist with regards to Mauritian primary education and not just those representing the often rhetorical "official" discourse. It shows that for the people of Mauritius, education is a very important societal matter. A recent survey for example

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<sup>2</sup> The joint UNESCO/UNICEF and Mauritius Examination Syndicate project (MES,1996) is an example of such research. The project consisted of a survey that (1) tested the standard and the level of the basic achievement of a large sample (52 schools) of nine year old pupils after four years of primary schooling, in literacy, numeracy and basic life skills and (2) identified home and school environment factors influencing learning achievement of the child (p.11). The usefulness of these findings is not in doubt. They may provide: "a rapid assessment which can inform educators and policy makers"(p.1), as well as 'benchmark data against which progress towards Education For All goals could be assessed' (p.11). However, both the methodology utilised in the project (instrument of 4 written tests given to children for assessing their skills) and the aim of the project (the assessment of achievement) indicate that the focus of this project is firmly concerned with the 'end product' side of education rather than its processes.

shows that in that country, education is the third national preoccupation after security of salaries and criminality (Week-End, 8 Dec., 1996, p. 26). In the media, educational issues are commented upon by a variety of people from within or outside Mauritian society and from within or outside the education system. Their comments are for the most part related to the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), the examination taken at the end of primary schooling and diverge in their display of what counts as an issue in relation to that examination. While a detailed account of comments found in the media has its place elsewhere, the following examples may serve as an illustration.

Given that Mauritian society requires success at CPE as a *sine qua non* condition to successful social advancement (for example, it is needed for gaining employment and for obtaining a driving license), the fact that, on average, only between 60% and 65% of children pass CPE constitutes an important issue often discussed in the media. In Mauritius, some secondary colleges are sanctioned as “good colleges”. Concerns related to the achievement of a ranking at CPE that will give access to “good colleges” are also issues discussed in the media. Similarly, because the Mauritian primary education system is guided if not determined by testing procedures such as the CPE, this, according to ‘voices’ in the press, has negative bearings on teaching and learning.

In light of the literature presented in this section it is possible to posit that, in developing countries and in Mauritius, the nation under study, educational research tends to be situated at the macro level and tends to use positivist and quantitative paradigms and strategies. Detailed and concrete information about school processes and how parents teachers, pupils and those people closely associated to school processes construe primary education is lacking in this research. It is also possible to posit that there is a

need to know what happens in schools and classrooms and that, with educational change in mind, there is a need to look at education in process and in context and a need to take into account lived expressions of education from the very people involved in educational processes.

King (1973) offers a humorous as well as powerful metaphor, summarising most of these points when he writes:

A toe-nail is always a toe-nail. You can analyse it chemically. You can tell whether it belongs to a man or a gorilla. You may deduce affinities between men and gorillas. You can tell whether the man wore shoes or not, and perhaps what colour he was. It is easy to recognise certain diseases, perhaps disorders of posture. But when you have all those items of knowledge correctly, you are a long way from knowing what dancing meant to him, what social problems he had, what his political views and activities were or anything important about him as a man. About his social context- and about his education's significance - there is not enough knowledge to begin analysis (p. 449).

These arguments together with the fact that, as Edmund King points out so well in the statement above, education is after all about people, provide the rationale for choosing a socio-cultural approach and qualitative research strategies in order to explore and analyse the ways in which the understanding of Mauritian primary education is conceived, articulated and experienced by Mauritian pupils, parents teachers and other people closely associated with schooling.

### **The purpose of the study**

The broad purpose of the study was to create an understanding of primary education in Mauritius, a developing country. Through a socio-cultural approach, the study sought:

- To describe and interpret school level actions, interactions and experiences as lived expressions of various Mauritian participant stakeholders.
- To gain an understanding of what parents, pupils, teachers and educationists construed as dominant issues of Mauritian primary education.
- To gain an understanding of the interplay and diversity of the voices which combined to create a Mauritian understanding of Mauritian primary education.
- To link and locate the Mauritian understanding of Mauritian primary education to its broader context comprising a structural and international appreciation of the place of primary education in developing countries.

### **Research methods<sup>3</sup>**

Individuals and schools were carefully chosen to conduct an in-depth study of experiences and understandings of Mauritian primary education. The research was a qualitative inquiry and incorporated the following features. Data was collected in Mauritius in natural settings, for the most part in two primary schools but also in participants' places of work and homes. An ethnographic design was selected as appropriate for the research purpose and the research specific focus on participants' actions.

The research was multimodal. Triangulation of methods was used to ensure the validity of data collected. They comprised observations, in-depth interviews and pupils' stories and drawings. Observations were used to describe people and settings, document routines and processes. In-depth interviews have been used to bring participants' constructs and document the issues and priorities which participants brought to the

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter Four presents a detailed outline of the qualitative methods used in this study.

understanding of Mauritian primary education. Stories and drawings have been used to elicit pupils' own understandings of Mauritian primary education.

The research was holistic because it incorporated multiple perspectives but also because it accessed three domains usually associated with human action. These domains are: the domain of manifest behaviour, the domain of internal or conscious processes and the domain of social meaning. Field work has been conducted in Mauritius over a period of four months, two of which were spent in two Mauritian primary schools. In addition to observational notes, data consisted of 51 taped in-depth interviews (in French, English and Creole) together with numerous informal conversations, 200 drawings and 31 stories. Data analysis has been emergent and inductive. It has consisted of concurrent analysis and systematic analysis consisting of indexing categorising, coding, comparing, synthesising and interpreting the several sources of data.

### **Clarification of terms and key concepts**

The following terms and concepts "developing countries", "stakeholders", "culture", "action" and "voices" require further clarification.

**Developing countries:** The term is taken as applying to some of the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America characterised by relatively low income per-capita, limited or no industrialisation and restricted infrastructure. The World Bank delineates three types of developing countries:

- 49 low income economies with a GNP per capita ranging between \$80 and \$730:

- 40 lower middle income economies with a GNP per capita ranging between \$770 and \$3,020 and;
- 17 upper middle economies with a GNP ranging between \$3,160 and \$8,210 (World Development Report, 1997).<sup>4</sup>

This delineation is to be understood in an economic relative sense and does not imply connotations of cultural poverty. Mauritius, a country rich in culture and tradition and with a GNP per capita of \$3,380 is a developing country in that economic sense.

**Stakeholders:** This term is used with reference to the research participants who had a direct personal and/ or professional interest and/or involvement in/with Mauritian primary education. They included pupils, parents, teachers and educationists.

Pupils were considered stakeholders because their daily lives were in great part structured by activities and experiences relating to primary education; their future to some extent depended on their primary education; they were the most numerous stakeholders in relation to primary education which in principle is intended to benefit them. Parents were considered stakeholders because primary education was an important aspect of their children's lives and future. Teachers were considered stakeholders because primary education processes constituted their work, they earned their living and position in society from working in the field of primary education. Educationists were stakeholders because all earned their living and position in society from working in the field of education most directly related to Mauritian primary

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<sup>4</sup> 26 countries are classified as developed high income economies have a GNP per capita which ranges between \$ 9,700 and \$ 40,630.



education. In many instances, teachers and educationists were also parents of children schooling in Mauritian primary schools.

What was meant by stakeholders in this investigation was restricted to the 'grassroots' level. In no way did it mean that a combination of all possible Mauritian stakeholders of Mauritian primary education was included in analysis. Table 5 in Chapter Three outlines the composition and rationale for selecting research participants. Chapter Nine provides a detailed analysis of what delineated and differentiated parents, teachers, pupils, and educationists as stakeholders able to contribute to an understanding of Mauritian primary education.

**Culture:** The culture of a society is generally believed to consist of the way of life of its members, the ideas beliefs and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. The term culture has in that sense been used by sociologists and anthropologists as a collective word to characterise the transmitted and non-biological aspects of society. According to Bruner (1996):

It is culture that provides the tools for organising and understanding our worlds in communicable ways ... learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilisation of cultural resources ... Nothing is culture free, but neither are individuals simply mirrors of their culture. It is the interaction between them that both gives a communal cast to individual thought and imposes a certain unpredictable richness on any culture's way of life, thought and feeling ... Life in culture is, then an interplay between the versions of the world that people form under its institutional sway and the versions of it that are the products of their individual histories (pp. 3&14).

In this study, culture is understood in Bruner's sense. Stakeholders' experiences and understandings of Mauritian primary education were not only perceived as products of, but also as constitutive of Mauritian culture. The socio-cultural approach of this study

posits culture as a context that forms the very base and is constitutive of contemporary experience of primary education. As a cultural artifact, education is sustained and transformed by the actions of people acting through or upon it. These notions will be further explored in Chapter Three.

**Action:** The social action perspective adopted in this study gave analytical priority to the actions of people in society rather than the structure of society as a whole. A fundamental assumption of a socio-cultural approach adopted in the study (Wertsch, 1991) was the idea that human beings are viewed as coming into contact with and creating their surroundings, as well as themselves, through the actions in which they engage. As such, human action is what has to be described and explained. "Action" includes what people say, what they say to each other, about each other, about common issues, as well as what they do. The concept of "action" as a tenet of a socio-cultural conceptual approach of this research is presented in Chapter Three.

**Voices:** The term "voices" is also a tenet of the socio-cultural conceptual approach adopted for the study (Wertsch, 1991). In one sense there is no distinction between the concept of "voices" and the concept of "action" as it has been defined above. "Voices" applies to what people say, to written as well as spoken communication and is generally concerned with "the broader issues of a subject's perspective, conceptual horizon, intention and world view" (Wertsch, 1991, pp. 50-51).

There is an additional dimension to the concept of "voices" which conveys the notion of interplay. "Voices" in a socio-cultural approach exist in a social milieu. They are links in a chain of communication and meaning comes into existence when two or more

voices come into contact in every day activity. The concept of “voices” as a tenet of a socio-cultural approach is also presented in Chapter Three.

In this research, stakeholders’ voices represent the diversity of less heard voices, those of pupils, parents, teachers and educationists. In an attempt to extend the analysis of Mauritian primary education, stakeholders’ voices are set against a background or alongside several strands of other “voices”:

- The structural concepts of the place of primary/basic education in developing societies.
- International viewpoint, ideals, principles and prescriptions as illustrated in United Nations and World Bank documents.
- The Mauritian official “voice” as shown in texts and policies and which has a powerful influence on every one and everything in the Mauritian education system.

### **Ethical considerations**

An important aspect of the research approach has been to conduct ethical research and this section outlines the steps taken in order to do so. Access to the two schools and introduction to outside participants was obtained through the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) and field work was conducted under the supervision of Professor Morrison, UNESCO Chair in Education in that Institute.

Following introduction from MIE staff, I was invited to first visit the two schools in December 1995, in order to establish contact with people, disclose information about my study to them and invite their participation in the research project. The first

discussion took place in the offices where I explained the purpose of my study to the head teachers and deputy head teachers and asked them if I could spend every day in their school for a month so as to experience the life of school. I indicated that my research involved observation of classroom activities, collecting children's drawings, talking (including taped interviews) with teachers, parents and pupils and that I would be pleased to contribute voluntary teaching in exchange.

Several important points related to my research were clarified during my meetings with head teachers and deputy head teachers. I clarified the fact that the aim of the research was not to check on people, but rather to learn from them as each of their views counts in the larger picture. I clarified that, although I was doing similar work in two schools, the purpose of the study was not to compare these two schools in terms of their achievement. I also clearly stated that the names of the schools would not be divulged to anyone, including people from the other school, and that the schools would be given fictitious names in the report. I clearly indicated that participation was not compulsory and that people were under no obligation to accept me in their classrooms or to accept to be audio-recorded during interviews. I clearly indicated that no report of what people said and did would be given to the authorities and that people would not be required to write their names anywhere. As a researcher coming from Australia, I had no personal stake in regard to primary education in Mauritius and as such would respect divergent opinions. The anonymity of participants was safeguarded. The names of individual participants or schools would not be divulged in conversations and writings now or later. Research participants would be given fictitious names in the final report.

The participants were informed that their contribution would provide clearer understanding of Mauritian primary education and would provide information which had potential to be useful for reform to improve the Mauritian primary education system.

Following these initial meetings, the head teachers (HT) and deputy head teachers (DHT) told me that they saw no objection to my being in their school for my research purposes. They welcomed the opportunity to give their point of view and they gladly accepted my offer of help. In both schools I was then invited to address staff as a group. In one school, this was done during the convivial end of year lunch, to which I was invited and in the other school during a friendly meeting over morning coffee. On both occasions, I repeated what I had said to the HTs and DHTs and gave the following additional information. I made clear that individuals had a final say whether they wanted to share their views and work with me, and that participants could drop out of the research at any time without penalty. I indicated that interviews would take the form of a conversation with me in either French, English or Creole and that I would let individuals know in advance the topics to be covered during taped conversations. In both schools I was also able to chat further with potential participants on an individual basis.

As a result of these meetings and the clear disclosure of my intentions, in both schools, the potential participants clearly indicated their approval of my being in their school for a full month during the first term of 1996.

The following summarises the steps that were taken during the actual data collection procedures for undertaking ethical research.

Interviews: Participants who accepted my invitation to be interviewed were reminded, prior to being interviewed, of the points relating to confidentiality described above. They were also reminded that they could terminate the interview if and when they wished and ask me at completion of the interview to erase from the tape anything they regretted having said. Teachers were interviewed during free periods under the shade of a tree in a place that, in both schools, became known as my office.

I came to know parents and explain my presence in the school by chatting with them while walking to and from school, by talking with them in the school yard and by the gate and by being introduced to them by teachers or other parents at gatherings such as Parents and Teachers Association (PTA). Over time and following parents understanding of my intentions, I invited some of them to participate in my research and be interviewed. These took place sitting in the shade of a tree in the school yard or in their own home. They were told, prior to being interviewed, about the points relating to confidentiality described above. They were also told that they could terminate the interview if and when they wished so and ask me at completion of the interview to erase from the tape anything they regretted having said. The few taped interviews of pupils were done during visits in parents' homes and with the permission of parents.

Outside participants were contacted by phone and sent a letter of introduction. As with the other participants, I explained my research to them, pointed to aspects of confidentiality and non-attribution and to the fact that they could terminate the interview

if and when they wished so. At completion of the interview, I asked if there was anything recorded on the tape that they wished to erase.

Drawings and stories: The pupils were made aware of the purpose of their drawing or story writings. None was done as a compulsory activity. The request for drawing was made in the playground to individual pupils or sometimes in class to pupils as a group. On all occasions it was made clear that providing me with drawings and stories was not compulsory, if pupils did not provide drawings this would not affect their grades. Drawings and stories were not to be considered as work and did not count in assessment procedures. Pupils were asked not to write their names on their drawings or stories. The names of pupils who, out of habit, forgot to follow that rule were erased. Children were given the opportunity to write their stories in French, English or Creole. Children's drawings and stories were considered as opinion and carried no individual attribution in the final report.

Observation: I always asked permission to enter a classroom in a way that allowed teachers to say no if they really wanted to (some did). I also made clear to teachers that my observation in their classrooms was for research purposes only and that no report would be written to their superiors in judgement of their practices. I came to classrooms as a learner and took great care not to disrupt teachers and pupils in their work and to behave with respect to cultural sensitivity. Notes were rarely written simultaneously as I observed. When notes were taken, teachers were fully aware of what I was observing.

At all times and stages of field-work, material collected in field books, interviews recorded audio cassettes and material computer diskettes has been kept confidential.

They will remain so for a period of five years at which time they will be destroyed. All participants were informed that, on its completion and acceptance, a copy of the thesis would be available for their perusal in the library of the Mauritius Institute of Education.

## **Research questions**

The research was brought into focus by the following question:

In what way is primary education conceived, experienced and articulated by various Mauritian stakeholders into priorities, issues and practices which combine to describe and extend an understanding of primary education in the Mauritian context?

These subsidiary questions were developed and refined during the early analytical stages of field-work and during the latter analytical stages at completion of field- work.

1. What characterises teachers, parents, pupils and educationists as stakeholders able to contribute to an understanding of Mauritian primary education?
2. What dominant features and practices frame and regulate pupils' experiences of primary education in classroom settings?



3. What issues dominate and regulate participant stakeholders' understandings of Mauritian primary education?
4. What are the contrasts between and across 'official' and other understandings of Mauritian primary education and what reasons underlie these contrasts?

An answer to each of these questions is presented in Chapter Nine in which the research findings are discussed.

### **Significance of the study**

The potential contribution of the research lies in the replicability of its methodological approach and techniques of the research as well as the generation of information useful for the improvement of the Mauritian primary education system and for comparative educational research.

The literature reviewed for this research shows that school processes take place in difficult conditions and that access to education as well as the promotion of equity remain important challenges for many developing countries at the dawn of the twenty-first century. It also shows that in most developing countries and certainly in those which, like Mauritius, have achieved provision of basic education for all children, the question of quality of education is increasingly gaining momentum at international and national levels. *The World Conference on Education for All* in Jomtien Thailand (1990), the recent *International Conference on Education* held in Geneva (1996), the *Report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century* (UNESCO, 1996), all

point to the urgency of looking into the nature and quality of what happens inside classrooms and all make a case that not only should children have the right to education, this right should include the development of their creative, mental and physical potential, their ingenuity, imagination and autonomy. In 1996 and in line with this desire to improve the quality of educational provision, the Mauritian government put in motion various reform commissions looking into the improvement of the education system in general and the primary education system in particular.

The micro focus of this research addresses dimensions not usually addressed and sought to bring to light detailed and concrete information about school level processes and thinking which could be useful for Mauritian people in several ways. This information could help locating Mauritian primary education within the framework of international ideals and principles in ways that may inform policy makers, should they want to adhere to these ideals and principles. In helping to clarify concrete issues and to make visible aspects of the demand side of education, this information could also prove useful and even crucial data for decision makers in their attempt to formulate policies designed to foster educational change with potential applicability at school level in Mauritian primary schools. Because it is detailed and concrete, this information may also prove useful to compare intent of education as stated in official documents, against outcomes of education in classrooms.

The review of literature also showed that detailed and concrete information about school processes and thinking is still in many ways lacking as a focus in research in developing countries. In providing such information, the research offers information about school level processes and thinking which in addition could be useful in creating an

information basis needed to conduct comparative educational research.

Moreover, the methodological approach developed for this research may be replicated to provide a similar holistic portrait of the understanding of education in any society. It is so because this approach makes its concern to take into account the socio-cultural particulars that differentiate various countries. It is also so because the multi-modal methods used in the research constitute a triangulated approach that brings validity to the data gathered. The combining of observation, verbal and pictorial communication data collection procedures utilised for this particular research can also be replicated and tested anywhere and for a variety of educational problems. In particular, the use of drawings has proven to be an effective method to solicit children's perception of their schooling. For this reason and because it is an innovative data collection technique, this method alone or together with other methods may serve as a spring board for further and more in-depth research in that direction.

Finally, while the micro focus of this research addressed dimensions not usually addressed in educational research traditions of developing countries, it also brought to the fore the voices of people not usually present and heard in analysis of primary education in developing countries. In doing so this research makes the voice of parents, teachers, pupils and educationists count and shows that these voices should not be ignored.

## **Thesis outline**

Chapter Two is a literature review that locates the understanding of Mauritian primary education in a wider context and takes stock of prior and other understandings of

primary education in developing nations. The chapter outlines a macro/ structural sociological understanding of education in developing societies. It presents a synopsis of ideals and principles of basic education as they are expressed through international organisations like UNESCO and the World Bank, and a synopsis of acknowledged issues pertaining to educational practices and processes in developing nations.

Chapter Three outlines the conceptual approach and design of the study. A social action perspective further enriched by tenets of socio-culturalism was adopted for extending the understanding of primary education in Mauritius. The nature of the research was directed by this perspective and tenets and aided the formulation of the conceptual framework and guided data analysis. The chapter first presents an overview of the social action tradition and how it applies to the research. It outlines the tenets and assumptions of socio-culturalism inspired by the work of James Wertsch (1991) and adopted as a theoretical tool in the study. The chapter concludes with the presentation of a conceptual framework that brings together the interplay between the dimensions under study.

Chapter Four presents the qualitative methodological approach and design of the study. It outlines the rationale for choosing a holistic ethnographic design. It details the selection and composition of sites and participants; participants' degree and extent of participation and data collection techniques which include observation, in-depth interviews, children's drawings and stories. It also details the steps and procedures undertaken during analysis which was inductive and emergent and provides a comprehensive outline of issues relating to reliability and validity of findings and interpretations.

Chapter Five analyses literature that serves to locate the understanding of contemporary Mauritian primary education in its broader societal and historical context. The first part is a selective account of the circumstances, peoples and events and socio- cultural patterns that over time have marked and characterised Mauritian societal development. The second part is a detailed account of the history and organisation of Mauritian education.

The findings of the study are presented in Chapters Six to Eight. Chapter Six depicts a day in the life of two Mauritian schools, which in the study have been given the fictional names of Four Hills and Terre Bleue. The chapter is developed from data gathered during observations in Terre Bleue and Four Hills, interviews with parents, pupils and teachers in these two schools and the stories and drawings of pupils in these two schools. The chapter describes the schools and people who frequent and work in these schools. It also describes their routines and activities.

Having set the school contexts and introduced some of the people, Chapter Seven enters the world of teaching and learning in classrooms in Four Hills and Terre Bleue. This chapter is developed from observational notes of classroom activities, from interviews and conversations with teachers and pupils from both schools, as well as childrens' drawings portraying classroom activities. Building on findings presented in the previous chapter, this chapter examines in more detail the educational practices which regulated pupils' experiences of primary education in classroom settings. Using two case studies, it also outlines dimensions of contrast in the ways in which pupils experienced primary education in those settings.

Chapter Eight builds on the two previous chapters. It uses several instrumental case studies to outline what participants construed as the dominant issues of Mauritian primary education and their views about it. The chapter is developed from interviews and conversations with parents, teachers and pupils from Four Hills and Terre Bleue; from stories written by upper grade pupils in Four Hills and Terre Bleue and; from in-depth interviews and conversation with Mauritian educationists.

Chapter Nine brings the research findings together and discusses them in light of the research questions. In this chapter, I examine what characterised pupils, teachers, parents, and educationists as stakeholders. I also discuss findings relating to classroom's processes and experiences and to the issues of Mauritian primary education as they were construed by participant stakeholders. Lastly, I discuss the contrasts and the reasons which underlie the contrasts between and across various Mauritian understandings of Mauritian primary education.

In Chapter Ten, the concluding chapter, I posit what can be learned from listening to and eliciting views from a broad range of people involved in education, the parents, the children, the teachers and the educationists and how that information can be useful for people seeking to improve the quality of Mauritian primary education for Mauritian children.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **UNDERSTANDING PRIMARY EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING SOCIETIES: A REVIEW OF APPROACHES, COMMITMENTS AND ISSUES**

Extending the understanding of any phenomenon implies locating this understanding in its wider context and taking stock of prior and/or other understandings. With this purpose in mind, this chapter is an analysis of literature reviewed, which outlines a macro-sociological understanding of the place of education in society and more particularly in developing societies. It also delineates the ideals and principles relating to basic education as they are formulated in documents or conferences produced under the aegis of organisations such as the World Bank and UNESCO. Lastly, it presents a synopsis of acknowledged issues and recommendations of how educational practices and processes found in primary schools in developing countries could be improved.

#### **Structural understandings**

Three main structural approaches: modernity/functionalist, conflict/ reproduction/ liberation and the emerging world institution sociological traditions are generally utilised to understand the place of education in society. Using examples from developing nations, the section outlines the analytical lines of these approaches <sup>5</sup>.

#### **The modernity/functionalist approaches**

The modernity tradition emphasises a uni-linear progression of society from traditionalism to modernity through promotion of combined factors of economic

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<sup>5</sup> See definition in Chapter One.

growth, values, behaviour and social structures appropriate to complex urban and industrial society, capital intensive technology, and politico-economic systems matching those of western industrialised nations.

The economist W. Rostow (1978) identifies three stages of economic development: "take off period", "drive to technological maturity" and "high-mass consumption". His explanation is based on the assumption that industrialisation and modernisation are necessary conditions for economic growth to occur and that there are no alternatives to this linear path except stagnation. Rostow (1971) indicates that for sustained economic growth to occur within society, a "profound set of changes" must take place. These changes require the "development of an institutional, social, and psychological setting such that the society reacts positively to the potential spreading effects of modern industrial activity" (Rostow, 1971, p.58). Education, for proponents of the modernity approach, is a major component of this developmental process.

McClelland (1961) supports this idea. He argues that the rise and fall of civilisations is due to the individual values held by the majority of the people within society and that there is a personality characteristic which he called the "achievement motive" acquired through socialisation (including education) which makes a society open to economic and technological advancement. Similarly, Inkeles and Smith (1974), contend that a society cannot develop until the majority of its population holds modern values while "modernising" economists (Schultz, 1961; Denison, 1962) saw education as a very important component of the necessary investment in human resource development and educated people as "human capital" (Schultz, 1961).



Modernist theorists view education as capable of effecting evolutionary development (social, economic and political) in a particular society. For this reason, in their analysis, education is important in helping people acquire the values and behaviours necessary for participating in modern democratic societies. In the modernity tradition, education is seen as a means by which to produce the skilled manpower and knowledge needed for technological progress and economic growth and is called upon to play a vital role in preparing people to function effectively in this process of growth. The modernist tradition places great confidence in the individual and in the nation to acquire knowledge and values which will help them to move on the same road travelled earlier by more affluent nations.

In the functionalist tradition, society is seen as a system composed of interrelated parts such as religion, education, political structures and family. In Parson's (1951; 1966) work, these parts are said to seek harmony between themselves through an agreed value consensus and help maintain the stability of the entire social system. The functionalist tradition is concerned with the social and economic functions of education. It stresses the need for education to be more congruent with the requirements of society and is concerned with finding a fit between an educational function and the system to carry it out. Talcott Parsons for example explains classrooms in terms of their functions for the school, the school in terms of its function for the educational system and the educational system in terms of its function for society. Parsons' work was extended through the work of Thomas Merton (1968), who distinguished between "manifest functions" and "latent functions" of education. For example a manifest function of education would be to stimulate curiosity but its latent function would be to stimulate conformity.

The taking on board of the implicit assumption that education brings economic growth and wealth is one of the reasons behind mass schooling in the Third World. Universal basic education of at least four to six years is regarded as the minimum requirement to sustain any kind of economic growth (Lockheed, Verspoor and Associates, 1991).

Empirical work detailing the relationship between economic change and demand for more schooling, as well as the contribution of education to economic development is voluminous (Tilak, 1989). Benavot (1985) for example found that primary education had a positive effect on the economic growth of 110 developing and developed nations. Lau, Dean and Louat (1991) found similar positive effects of primary education in 22 East Asian and Latin American countries. In general, however, studies examining the contribution of education to economic development concentrate on the effects of years of formal schooling rather than the effects of educational experience or cognitive outcomes of schooling (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates, 1991).

Some empirical findings challenge the tenets of modernisation theory. Fuller (1991) notes, for example, that in some instances industrial expansion, because it competes with school for the attention and labor of youth, has historically retarded enrolment growth. Fuller also remarks that early education systems in the Third World focussed on training bureaucrats. He argues that, despite changes in the nature of demand and despite their little utility to the economy, the content of education (academic curriculum, colonial languages of instruction) as well as traditional forms of pedagogy in place in colonial eras, have remained in many Third World educational systems. Whether education is functionally fitting economic demands and motivations therefore depends upon the content and efficacy of what goes on inside classrooms (Fuller, 1991, p.51).

Because it increases chances of employment in the modern economy, education has generally become very popular in developing societies (Foster, 1968; Dore, 1976; Thomson, 1981; Coombs, 1985; Hulme & Turner, 1990). Education of the 'classical' as opposed to technical and vocational sort seems to be the most important route to the achievement or confirmation of social status and social mobility or even wealth, hence its continuing popularity.

In his study of Ghanaian schools, Foster (1968) propounded an explanation of the marked preference for high standing long-cycle educational courses over technical and vocational education. His main argument is that the aspirations of parents and students regarding future occupations are motivated by prospective salaries, rather than by what is taught in schools. Learning carpentry and mechanics in schools, therefore, is not perceived as a means of enabling students to attain coveted high salaries commanded by prestigious professions such as medical doctor, lawyer and the likes. Increased participation in the schooling process has created the phenomenon of educated unemployment. Dore (1976), notes that increased educational opportunities have led to the "diploma disease", where education becomes the means of obtaining qualifications in order to secure a job, rather than learning to do a job.

According to the modernity/ functionalist perspective, teachers are construed as agents of the state, socialising children into the advantages of modern progress (Collins, 1985). Their role is to hold authority, maintain order and the loyalty of pupils within schools and at the same time conform to the dictates of their superiors and the state (Fuller, 1991, p. 101). Children learn that formal authorities legitimately define the nature of

their work and that work is rewarded by others, rather than hold intrinsic value for themselves.

Fuller (1991) remarks that expanding access to education and the implementation of a standardised national curriculum, as is often the case in developing societies, illustrate how "the state extends membership and universally defined modern status to the child" (p. 32). He contends that schooling:

... helps define a common meritocratic order where each individual child has a chance at getting ahead – if he or she works hard and learns how to achieve within modern (bureaucratic) organisations. ... This is functional for the nation state since productivity, material accumulation and hence the state's own stability depend both on a broad division of labor and popular perception that the opportunity structure is fair. Mechanisms linked to the association of status and opportunity are critical elements of national education systems. These organisational devices are far more important than whether any learning actually occurs in the classroom (Fuller, 1991, p.33).

A study of practices, routines and interactions at the school level would provide the data needed to support or disclaim the existence of these and other functional mechanisms as well as to increase understanding of the nature and extent of these and other functional mechanisms.

### **The conflict/reproduction/liberation approaches**

Since the 1960s, the modernity /functionalist tradition has been challenged by other approaches in which theorists hold critical interpretations of the place of education in society. In contrast with functional theorists who see education as a means of nation building, child building and as a "common good" (Fuller, 1991), critical theorists ask who gains and who loses authority and resources in being educated.

Like modernist and functionalist theorists, conflict or critical theorists see the school as serving the interest of the economy and of the state. In contrast, however, they argue that governments have little institutional autonomy and little capacity to pursue social agendas that do not serve the central capitalist project and economic expansion. Fuller (1991) remarks that for critical theorists, nations' rendition of the "common good ... actually reinforce the status, affluence, knowledge and customs of the economic elites" (p. 35).

Conflict theorists argue that as an institution, education reinforces a structure that yields unequal opportunity (Carnoy 1972; 1974; Apple, 1982). Apple (1982) for example, argues that the cultural dominance of the capitalist class results in society being inundated with the symbols of capitalist order, the values and language specified by the elite. These theorists argue that the purpose of education in capitalist society is not to select and educate the brightest ones, but to perpetuate differences which are legitimised by certificates of educational achievement. Collins (1979), for example, contends that most occupations require few of the skills taught in schools, yet employers rely on educational credentials for hiring as well as promoting not because of the technical skills they are supposed to reflect, but because they assume that the person with such credentials has been socialised into the "values" and "norms" of the dominant culture. Giroux (1983) argues that schooling provides students from different social strata with the knowledge and skills necessary to occupy "their place" in society.

Critical analyses emphasise how schooling and education reinforce the authority, ideology and resources of elite classes, not the various interests of communities and less powerful classes. Critical theorists are proponents of the "reproduction" perspective and

see education as an institution that replicates the class structure of peripheral nations and colonial patterns of domination, thus keeping developing countries in oppressed and dependent conditions (Carnoy, 1974). For “reproduction” theorists, education is a mechanism that reproduces the values of the dominant social group (Carnoy, 1972; Persell, 1977; Boudon, 1974). Education socialises pupils into the formal language of mainstream or dominant culture (Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Another conflict theorist, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, has come to represent attempts of liberation from the yoke of oppression<sup>6</sup>. For Freire (1972, 1973, 1985) education or “conscientization” is a form of liberation. It is the means through which people can realise their best human capacities and press for humane changes in society. Freire argues that education, by producing a literate population, can be seen by some as a threat to the economic and political status quo and he states: “It would be extremely naive to expect the dominant classes to develop a type of education that would enable subordinate classes to perceive social injustices critically” (1985, p. 12). Freire’s view which came to be known as liberation tradition stresses the importance and worth of the individuals, but always in their community settings. It also maintains the importance of non-manipulative education that promotes raised consciousness within individuals.

### **World institutions approach**

Meyer (1980) offers a social theory which parallels Wallerstein’s (1974, 1980) theoretical work on economic world systems. World institution theorists focus on the “institutional foundations” that serve to both legitimise and support Western economies.

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<sup>6</sup> Paulo Freire’s (1921-1997) work with the poor led him to being jailed for subversion and exiled in Chile. In 1969, he became a visiting professor at Harvard University where he wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He was awarded the Comenius Medal, by UNESCO in 1994, for his life work devoted to the liberation through education of fellow human beings.

John Meyer (1980) stresses that new nations attempt to build and reinforce central institutions and that to become a "citizen" the individual must learn the "wisdom of western knowledge". The fact that pupils sit for Cambridge examinations in numerous Anglophone African nations, or the promises made by political leaders to supply schools in the near future with computers (despite the fact that many are not supplied with electricity) are illustrations of this desire.

Boli, Ramirez and Meyer (1985) and Ramirez and Boli (1987) argue that economic competition between nations has caused the incentive for nations to organise state controlled educational systems. They suggest that Western ideals and forms of organisations transcend national boundaries and have established themselves in emerging nation states. In their view, Western school is a structure surrounded by popular support and symbols of modernity which serve to explain the massive increase in the provision of schooling witnessed, despite scarce economic resources, in Third World nations.

World institution theorists, according to Fuller (1991) describe mass schooling as a "political good" which promotes the joining into modern polity and advances meritocratic opportunities (p. 45). This view is in opposition to the modernist/functional and conflict traditions, which see education as boosting economic imperatives. The institutional viewpoint emphasises:

...the importance of shared and sacred commitments regarding how modern organisation and modern socialisation should appear to operate [and attempts to demonstrate that there is]...a set of cultural and political commitments that are moving across national boundaries and historical conditions (Fuller 1991, p. 58).

Using the forum provided by international organisations, the next section outlines some of these commitments with regards to modern socialisation. It outlines what "international society" formulates as the ideals and principles of basic education in relation to individual achievement and social development.

### **International view-points**

Several international organisations, most notably UNESCO and the World Bank, have educational development as part of their mandate. McNeely (1995) suggests that "international organisations as representative of and part of international society, define and promote overall world-level principles and ideals" (p. 504). International society's viewpoint is to be understood as a consensus of opinion which people at the local level are usually not involved in creating. The documents produced by or under the aegis of these two organisations provide a forum where the principles and ideals regarding many aspects of education are expressed. The distinct interest of this thesis is primary education. For this reason this section outlines a perspective on the nature of basic education as well as its place in relation to individual achievement and social development.

### **Basic Education for All**

An important vehicle for the transmission of world-level principles and ideals about basic education has been the World Conference on "Education for All" (WCEFA), held in 1990 in Jomtiem, Thailand. The conference and subsequent *World Declaration on Education for All* and its recommendations stated in the *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Needs*, published by UNESCO (1990) expressed a world-wide consensus on the necessity of both ethical and economic grounds of education for all. The following



outlines the principles which formed the basis of the World Declaration on Education for All.

- The recalling that education is a fundamental right for all people;
- The understanding that education can help ensure a safer, healthier more prosperous environmentally sound world and that simultaneously contributes to social economic and cultural progress, tolerance and international cooperation;
- The knowing that education is an indispensable key to, though not sufficient condition for, personal and social improvement;
- The recognising of the value and validity of traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage to both define and promote development;
- The acknowledging that the current provision of education is seriously deficient and that it must be made more relevant and qualitatively improved and made universally available;
- The recognising that sound basic education is fundamental to the strengthening of higher levels of education and of scientific and technological literacy and capacity and thus self-reliant development; and
- The recognising of the necessity to give present and coming generations an expanded vision of basic education to address the scale and complexity of the challenge (UNESCO, 1990, p. 2).

The *World Declaration on Education for All* reaffirmed the principle that education is a societal objective. It expanded the vision of basic education and renewed commitment to ensure that the basic learning needs of all children youths and adults are met effectively in all countries. "Basic learning needs" and "learning acquisition" as they

were defined in the *World Declaration on Education for All*, are outlined in Table 1 and Table 2.

**TABLE 1: THE WORLD DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR ALL: DEFINING BASIC LEARNING NEEDS**

<p><b>Every person, child, youth or adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.</b></p>
<p>Basic learning needs are comprised of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving and;</li><li>• The knowledge skills values and attitudes to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, live and work in dignity , participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning</li></ul>

Source: UNESCO, 1990, *World Declaration on Education for All*, Article 1: Meeting basic learning needs (pp. 3-5).

**TABLE 2: THE WORLD DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR ALL: DEFINING LEARNING ACQUISITION**

<p><b>Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development for an individual or for society depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities, whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability skills and values</b></p>
<p>The focus of basic education must therefore be on actual learning acquisition and outcome rather than exclusively upon enrolment, continued participation in organised programmes and completion of certification requirements. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential. It is therefore necessary to define acceptable levels of learning acquisition for educational programmes and to improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement.</p>

Source: UNESCO, 1990, *World Declaration on Education for All*, Article 4: Focussing on learning acquisition (pp. 3-5).

### Educational opportunity, choice and standards

The *World Education Reports* produced by UNESCO every second year since 1991 are another important venue in which to find statements of international perspective, principles and ideals with regard to the place of education in contemporary society. The opening paragraph of the *1993 World Education Report* for example sets the vision of education for the 1990s:

In the new vision of the world development that is beginning to emerge in the 1990s, knowledge, human ingenuity, imagination and good will are the only resources that finally matter. No lasting progress, it is realised, can be made towards peace and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without them. The role of education in developing them is recognised as crucial (UNESCO, 1993, p. 16).

Educational choice, equality of opportunity and standards, set against a background of international conventions<sup>7</sup>, are the specific principles and foci of the UNESCO 1993 *World Education Report*. Article 4 of the *Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960) together with articles 28 and 29 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), presented in Tables 3 and 4 provide that background.

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<sup>7</sup> Eight International Conventions dealing wholly or in part with education are currently in force. They are: *Convention Against Discrimination in Education* (1960); *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1965); *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966); *Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage* (1972); *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (1979); *Convention on the Right of the Child* (1989); *Convention on Technical and Vocational Education* (1989).

**TABLE 3: EDUCATIONAL CHOICE AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY: CONVENTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION**

**Article 4**

The States Parties to this Convention undertake to formulate, develop and apply a national policy which, by methods appropriate to the circumstances and to national usage, will tend to promote equality of opportunity and of treatment in the matter of education and in particular:

- To make primary education free and compulsory ; make secondary education in its different forms generally available and accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity; assure compliance by all with the obligation to attend school prescribed by law;
- To ensure that the standards of education are equivalent in all public educational institutions of the same level and that the conditions relating to the quality of the education provided is also equivalent;
- To encourage and intensify by appropriate methods the education of persons who have not received any primary education;
- Provide training for the teaching profession without discrimination.

Source: UNESCO (1960). *Convention against Discrimination in Education*, Adopted by the General Conference at its eleventh Session, Paris, 14 December, 1960, Paris: UNESCO.

**TABLE 4: EDUCATIONAL CHOICE AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY: CONVENTION ON THE RIGHT OF THE CHILD**

**Article 28**

1. State Parties recognise the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity , they shall in particular:

- Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
- Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child . . . ;
- Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
- Make educational and vocational information and guidance available to all children;
- Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates

2. State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

**Article 29**

State Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- The development of respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Source: United Nations (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations

Most of the countries, which ratified these conventions, found it necessary to undertake some adjustment programme in order to follow the principles stated in these conventions. However, in the case of developing countries, the effects of economic structural adjustment in the 1980s and for most the deterioration in key education indicators that followed, meant that the messages contained in international conventions were rarely invoked at national level of discussion about education. The *1993 World Education Report* notes that it is only now that these statements have become widely appreciated and that their implications can be assessed (p. 54).

In light of the statements presented in Tables 3 and 4, “educational choice”, “equality of opportunity” and “standards” are defined as:

- the right to free primary education for all children;
- the provision of different forms of secondary education for all children;
- the provision of education of equivalent standards and quality for all children in all public educational institutions;
- the opportunity for all children to receive an education that develops their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

In both “developed” and “developing” countries, the idea of “school choice” is usually understood to refer to the choice between state and private schools. In a number of industrial countries “school choice” has become also a question of choice among state schools and the idea that parents should have the liberty to choose a school of their choice. This development was not foreseen in any of the conventions. In the USA, the UK and France, the reasons for this development are usually linked with the actual

conditions and climate of the schools. This is the case in large cities where drug violence and gangs have become the norm. The Report indicates that:

Parents feel trapped. In principle they have the liberty of choice, but in practice, unless they can afford to send their children to a private school or change residence, they are condemned to send them to the local state school regardless of whether it is able to provide a decent education for any child (UNESCO, 1993 p. 60).

The focus on and desire for “decent” education is not new. Article 29 of the *Convention on the Right of the Child* and article 4 of the *World Declaration on Education for All* called on countries to define acceptable levels/standards of learning acquisition for educational programmes. The 1993 *World Education Report* states that: “while there is general agreement in most countries about the importance of basic skills, there is less agreement beyond that”. It remarks that a debate exists in most countries between advocates of an emphasis on process oriented skills (eg reasoning, creative thinking and problem solving) and advocates of an emphasis on content and notes that “in countries with highly developed examination systems there has been a stronger emphasis on knowledge of content at the expense of process oriented skills”<sup>8</sup> (p. 80-81).

### **Effective Primary Education “a rock-bottom necessity for development”**

In *Primary Education: A World Bank Policy Paper* (1990), “effective primary education” is described as, “the rock bottom necessity for development” (p.10).

Primary education is presented as the foundation upon which nations’ economic growth, social development and the welfare of individuals are built. It has two purposes: First to

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<sup>8</sup> Kellaghan & Greaney (1992) remark that: “Public examinations undoubtedly exert enormous pressure on activities in schools. Teachers tend to gear teaching to the tests to be taken and to ignore material not featured in such tests, even if it is mandated in the official curriculum”. In search for improvement, they suggest that: “higher –order cognitive skills should be assessed to ensure they are taught” (pp. 2-3).

produce literate and numerate people and second to lay the groundwork for further education.

The beneficial effects of primary education on development are, according to the *Paper*, due to the cognitive skills such as literacy, numeracy and problem solving such education imparts. It is noted that the newly industrialised economies like Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Singapore and Israel achieved universal, or nearly universal, primary enrolment before rapid economic growth (p.11).

The *Paper* notes that national development prospects hinge on people's ability to: "acquire, adapt and advance knowledge" and that ineffective primary schooling jeopardises the entire effort for human capital development. It asserts that ineffective primary education, in which pupils, even when they complete primary education, often have not learned the core skills commonly specified in the national curriculum, leads to the 'production' of graduates who are poorly prepared for secondary and tertiary education and of workers, managers and parents ill-equipped for life-long learning and efficient contribution to the nation's development (p.11).

### **"Learning: the treasure within"**

The *Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century* (1996) (hereafter the *Report*) is the latest international platform to examine and propose ideals and principles about the place of education in relation to individual achievement and social development. In the introduction to the *Report*,

Jacques Delors, Chairman of the *International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century* states that education is:

... at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception to develop all our talents to the full and to realise our creative potential , including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our personal aims (Jacques Delors, Chairman of the International Commission on Education for the twenty-First Century, UNESCO, 1996, p. 17).

Education, in the *Report*, is advanced as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper form of human development, reduce poverty, exclusion and ignorance, oppression and war. In a changing world, education is also advanced as having to play an important role in meeting the challenges of the next century. In doing so, it will have to adapt itself to the tensions between tradition and modernity, between competition and equality of opportunity, spiritual aspirations and material reality as well as local interests and global aspirations.

The *Report* reiterates the concept of learning throughout life introduced in the *Faure Report* (1972). It emphasises the necessity to learn how to learn in order to deal with new situations as they arise in one's personal and working lives. To that end, the content of basic education should be "designed to stimulate a love of learning and knowledge and develop the desire and provide the opportunities for learning throughout life" (p. 24). The Report introduces "four pillars" as foundations of education: "Learning to be"; "learning to know", "learning to do", and "learning to live together".

Learning to be, so as better to develop one's personality and be able to act with greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect of a person's potential: memory,



reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities and communication skills.

Learning to know, combining a sufficiently broad, general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects. This also means learning to learn so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life.

Learning to do, in order to acquire not only an occupational skill but also, more broadly, the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams. It also means learning to do in the context of young people's various social and work experiences.

Learning to live together, by developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence - carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts- in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace (Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, 1996, Highlights, p. 37).

The *Report* indicates that formal education systems tend to emphasise the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of other types of learning. It asserts that, at the eve of the twentieth century, it is vital to conceive education in a more encompassing fashion and that such a vision should inform and guide future educational reforms and policy, in relation both to contents and methods of education, stating that:

Educational policy must be sufficiently diversified and must be so designed as not to become another contributory cause of social exclusion

The socialisation of individuals must not conflict with personal development. It is therefore necessary to work towards a system that strives to combine the virtues of integration with respect for individual rights (UNESCO 1996, Highlights, p. 37).

The *Report's* vision of education is as a necessary "utopia" in which none of the talents hidden like buried treasure in every person must be left untapped.

## **School-level processes**

The expression school level can be likened to the expression "grassroots level" which describes what happens "at the popular level as distinguished from the centers of political leadership" (*Webster's New Encyclopedia Dictionary* 1993 p. 437). This section is a synopsis of current understanding of primary education in developing nations. It outlines the acknowledged issues regarding teaching and learning in classrooms in developing nations and summarises recommendations of how practices and processes could be improved.

### **Teaching and learning processes: The acknowledged issues**

The entire literature about education in developing countries acknowledges that in comparison with industrial/western societies, schooling in the "Third World" takes place under less materially propitious conditions. Lockheed and Verspoor (1991), for example, note that:

Despite the lack of empirical evidence on school environments ... anecdotal evidence suggests that in developing countries the basic elements of an orderly school environment are frequently missing: students and teachers are frequently absent, the stock of teaching materials is limited, and the physical surrounding is detrimental to learning. The conditions in many schools are so chaotic that it seems miraculous that learning occurs at all, and much of what does occur appears to be haphazard rather than the result of a deliberate focus on the content and process of instruction (1991, p. 43).

Whether children actually learn anything or acquire "essential knowledge and skills", even when they do go to school has become the enduring question. This is the acknowledged issue of the last decade in analyses about what goes on in primary education classrooms of the developing world (Fuller, 1986, 1991; Hawes & Stephens, 1990; UNESCO, 1990; Heyneman, 1990; Graham-Brown, 1991; Avalos, 1996a, 1996b). Many studies are critical of the pedagogical practices in place in the classrooms

of the Third World.

Nitsaisook's (1985) study for example, illustrates teaching practices in 79 Thai fifth grade mathematics classrooms containing 2,332 pupils. The study, part of an International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) cross national study, revealed that in Thailand, 54.39 per cent of teachers' time was allocated to lecturing, explaining; and 29.52 per cent of the time was allocated to seat-work, written; 10.30 per cent was allocated to review; 2.5 per cent to oral practice drill. Of interest is the way Nitsaisook (1985) describes teaching in the Thai classrooms.

... Lessons include not only the presentation of new material but also the re-explaining of the material previously taught. This re-explaining always occurs when the teachers find the students either cannot give correct answers or do not solve the problems in the assigned exercises correctly. This finding seems to reflect the conviction of some of the teachers that only explanations can help students to learn the lessons. One may wonder whether the teachers understand the concepts of re-teaching and re-explaining. Furthermore, even though a great number of questions are asked, most of them are either recall or simple direct questions mostly initiated by teachers. The main purpose of asking questions seems to be maintenance of the students' attention to the teachers' explanations and of the students' engagement in teaching activities rather than to check the students' understanding of the lessons concepts. In addition, ... most teachers do only general comprehension checks, eg., the teachers ask students whether they understood (p. 65).

Newman (1989) in an ethnographic study of grassroots education in India notes that:

Small children were acculturated to school or made to adjust to school discipline by force or its threat. ... No rules were explained. No child was ever praised as a 'good child' or 'model pupil'. ... traditional patterns emphasised taking what was handed down. Traditional students were humble receivers of knowledge ... they were not avid questioners or seekers in the enlightenment-inspired Western mode (p.17).

In the context of the South American region Avalos (1996a) notes that teaching strategies, which she describes as being "teacher-centred", "frontal" and "authoritarian",

still fail to address the learning needs of students and challenge them sufficiently. She states:

... Teachers either feel they have responsibilities as sole providers of stimuli for learning or . . . with limited background knowledge, few teaching resources and limited repertoire of teaching strategies, are forced to teach stereotyped contents and limit the range of intellectual development of their pupils. ... The fact that for the greater number of children now attending schools compared to a decade ago, learning achievement is unsatisfactory, especially as regards basic skills for communication and participation in society (reading, writing, computational abilities) draws attention once again to teachers and how they teach (1996, pp. 7-8).

Similarly, Wolf, Schiefelbein and Valenzuela (1993) note that in many Latin American primary education classrooms, teaching:

... takes place through presenting material to a whole class often writing on the chalkboard the contents of the lesson or explanations to be copied by children. Teachers use the same strategies in all situations and for all audiences. Often the structure and sequence of the lessons are inadequate but the teacher does not stop to get feedback from pupils and therefore to adapt his or her teaching to the situation. Normally teachers do not ask pupils to take part in the lesson. Alternative teaching/learning strategies such as small group instruction, cooperative learning, individual coaching, problem solutions, group decision and free writing are seldom used (1993, p. 70).

Simple observation of teaching in Bangladesh leads Avalos (1996b) to the conclusion that in that country:

... like in many other countries, it [teaching] is dull, focussed on rote learning and offers very little stimulus to a child's imagination, creativity, sense of play or beauty. In the limited number of its forms it is almost entirely bent on getting children to repeat knowledge found in their textbooks that only cover core subjects (p. 24.).

Jennis-Wray's (1984) article on "integrated learning" in Jamaica shows that teachers dominated lessons, asked few open-ended questions and spent 59 per cent of the time

talking (pp. 265-78). While, in an article titled "*Vocal teachers silent pupils? Life in Botswana classrooms*" Fuller and Snyder (1991) found that pupils spent 54 per cent of the observed teaching time listening to teachers' lectures and that 43 per cent of that time was spent in oral recitation (pp. 274-94). Fuller (1991) notes that throughout Africa, classroom teaching involves "frequent oral recitation of vocabulary or arithmetic exercises delivered in unison by pupils ... at times an individual child will be asked to provide the one right answer to a set question" (p. 68).

In their recent study, *The quality of primary schools in different development contexts* Gabriel Carron and Ta Ngoc Châu (1996) conclude that:

... The pedagogical processes observed in all four countries [India, China, Guinea and Mexico] are traditional in nature that is fairly rigid and centred on the teacher rather than the pupil... (p.202)...It must be said that more progressive methods, favouring learning centred on the child, based on discovery and consequently on the construction of knowledge by the pupil himself, require that the teachers have a level of competence and especially of motivation much higher than that which one generally finds among teachers covered by the survey (p.190).

As these examples have shown, much of the teaching practices in the classrooms of developing countries seem to include substantial reliance on teachers' lectures, memorisation of material, rather than application of knowledge. They also seem to include few opportunities for pupils to question and participate.

### **Shifts in focus for improvement of educational processes**

In their study, which synthesises the results of four years of research and consultation on the effectiveness and efficiency of primary education in developing countries and in light of the criticisms stated above, Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates (1991) delineate several areas for improving learning achievements. These areas are: a) effective schools;

b) curriculum; c) learning materials; d) time for learning; and e) effective teaching; and f) children teachability. Their recommendations are based on an extensive review of teaching and learning in developing countries. The following summarises the recommendations they make in these six areas.

a) Effective schools should comprise an orderly and clean school environment in which teachers maintain discipline, begin lessons on time and let students know what is expected of them. Effective schools should establish clearly defined goals for academic achievement and monitor pupils' progress in order to determine whether these goals are met. Academically successful schools should set high expectations for work and achievement. They should have strong principals, close to the instructional processes and engender a common sense of commitment and collegiality among the staff (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates, 1991, pp. 43-44).

b) Curriculum. Textbooks, the major if not only definition of curriculum in developing countries, should be properly designed, factually accurate, appropriately illustrated and reinforce the development of higher order thinking skills, that is, problem solving skills and critical thinking (pp. 45-47). Because multiple language instruction slows down the acquiring of literacy generally, the most effective approach is to begin with the home language as the medium of instruction and add or switch to a second language later so that children are able to acquire basic literacy, learn the fundamentals in various subjects and adjust to the school and its demands, before they confront the task of learning a new language (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates, 1991, p.167).

c) Learning materials. The availability of good (pedagogically sound, culturally relevant and physically durable) textbooks and teachers guides have a consistent positive effect on students achievement in developing countries (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates, 1991, p.57).

d) Time for learning. International standards state that school year should comprise 880 hours. Policy makers should adjust to these standards while local efforts for the maintaining of these standards should ensure that schools are open during official hours and that teachers are present and teaching during the official instructional periods (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates, 1991, p. 62).

e) Effective teaching. Teachers' language proficiency and their level of formal education generally have positive effects on pupils' achievement (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991, p. 62).

At a bare minimum effective teaching should involve: (i) presenting material in an orderly and rational fashion, pacing the class to the student's level and taking into account individual differences; (ii) providing students with opportunities to practise and apply what they have learned; (iii) letting students know what is expected of them and (iv) monitoring and evaluating student performance in such a way that students can learn from their own mistakes.

Teaching practices enhancing pupils' learning include:

(i) pupils' active participation; (ii) practising what has been taught and applying it to own experience; (iii) monitoring and evaluating pupils performance; (iv) giving

appropriate feedback on performance (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates, 1991 pp. 63-71).

**f) Teachability.** The capacity to learn in school is determined by the prior learning experience, health and nutritional status of each child. Children with stimulating home environment, from higher social classes and more educated parents learn more quickly in school than children from more deprived backgrounds. Providing school snacks may alleviate learning problems related to protein-energy malnutrition and temporary hunger associated with short time fasting, for example, when children do not eat breakfast. Similarly, screening for visual and auditory problems is important for increasing the teachability of children, especially poor children (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates 1991, pp. 73-89).

These recommendations indicate a shift of focus from teaching to learning. This focus implies that teachers need to be aware of what is required to achieve better learning. For teachers, this implies the ability to concentrate on understanding rather than curriculum coverage, to stimulate the acquisition of knowledge rather than impart knowledge and to acknowledge that pupils are different rather than homogeneous.

Developing nations are not homogeneous in terms of their educational development. Following the World Bank classification of low-income countries<sup>9</sup>, lower-middle

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<sup>9</sup> 49 countries classified as low income economies have a GNP per capita which ranges between \$80 (Mozambique) to \$730 (Armenia).

40 countries classified as lower-middle income economies have a GNP per capita which ranges between \$770 (Lesotho) to \$ 3,020 (Venezuela).

17 countries classified as upper middle income economies have a GNP per capita which ranges between \$3,160 (South Africa) to \$8,210 (Greece). Mauritius with a GNP per capita \$3,380 is a upper middle income economy.

26 countries classified as high -income economies have a GNP per capita which ranges between \$9,700 (Korea Rep.) to \$40,630 (Switzerland). (World Development Report, 1997).



income and upper-middle and high-income countries, Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) delineate different challenges with regards to teaching and learning processes.

For low-income countries, which for the most part are striving to establish a mass education system that imparts core academic and other skills to a high proportion of the school-age population, the challenge is to provide basic material, and pre-trained teachers in order to reach what Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) call the “formalism stage” (p. 225).

For lower-middle income countries, many of which already provide mass education the challenge is to increase the number of schools in which more advanced problem solving skills are taught in order to prepare students for further education or on the job learning. In those countries with a higher proportion of trained teachers, the challenge and change in focus is to improve their knowledge, skills and ability to teach problem solving and strengthen their pedagogical skills development in order to reach what Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) call the “transition stage” (p.225).

For upper-middle income and high income countries in which mass education, teacher education and training are generally satisfactory, the challenge is to refocus attention on teaching problem solving skills rather than basic skills to all pupils. Newly industrialised economies such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia, for example, seek to develop strong scientific and technical education in order to improve their competitiveness in the world economy. These nations, according to Lockheed, Verspoor and Associates (1991), should concentrate on teaching advanced problem-solving skills and strengthen pedagogical skill development. They should strive to reach the “meaning

stage" in which teaching methods foster problem solving and creativity while catering to the individual differences of students (p. 225).

In order to attain these long term objectives, nations must change significantly on a large scale and challenges are many in order to do so. Two of these challenges, because they provide circumstantial evidence for the proposed research, are presented in the following:

Challenge arises when different parties have different degrees of commitment to the reform. A large-scale program that responds to issues that central policy makers and planners consider priorities may not respond to issues that are priorities for administrators and parents at the school level. Thus the local commitment to national programs is often limited (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates, 1991, p. 221).

Achieving educational change is difficult under any circumstances; it is especially challenging in the unstable environments that prevail in developing countries. In these countries, the generic problems are aggravated by policy makers who have only a limited knowledge of how teaching and learning actually take place in the classroom and how schools are actually managed (Lockheed, Verspoor & Associates 1991, p. 223).

These two challenges are reasons providing part of the rationale for bringing to light experiences and perceptions of primary education from people other than decision and policy makers.

## **Summary**

For proponents of the modernist tradition, education is a major component of a developmental process that will take societies from traditionalism to modernity.

Education helps people acquire the values and behaviours necessary for participating in modern democratic societies. It provides the means by which to produce the skilled

manpower and knowledge, "human capital", needed for technological progress and economic growth. Modernist theorists place great confidence in the individual and in the nation to acquire knowledge and values which will help them to travel the road travelled earlier by more affluent nations.

Empirical studies examining and detailing the contribution of education to economic development is voluminous but concentrate on the effects of years of formal schooling rather than the effects of educational experience or cognitive outcomes of schooling.

The functionalist tradition is concerned with the social and economic functions of education. In that tradition, classrooms are explained in terms of their (manifest and latent) functions for the school, the school in terms of its function for the educational system and the educational system in terms of its function for society. Teachers are construed as agents of the state, socialising children into the advantages of modern progress. Their role is to hold authority, maintain order and loyalty of pupils within schools and at the same time conform to the dictates of their superiors and the state. Children, for their part, learn that formal authorities legitimately define the nature of their work and that work is rewarded by others rather than hold intrinsic value for themselves. In that tradition, the functional devices appear more important than whether or what kind of learning takes place in classrooms.

Proponents of the conflict/reproduction/liberation approaches hold critical interpretations. They ask who gains and who loses authority and resources in being educated. Like functionalist theorists, they see education as serving the interests of the economy and the state arguing, in contrast, that governments have little autonomy and

capacity to pursue social agenda if they do not serve capitalism and economic expansion.

Conflict theorists argue that education, as an institution, reinforces a structure that yields unequal opportunity and reinforces the status, knowledge and wealth of the economic elites. They see education as socialising children into the norms and values of the dominant culture; as teaching children their place in society; as perpetuating and making legitimate differences with certificates of educational achievement and keeping developing nations in oppressed and dependent conditions. Proponents of the liberation tradition, on their part, emphasise the importance and worth of the individuals but always in their community settings. They maintain the importance of non-manipulative education that promotes raised consciousness within individuals.

Modernity/functionalist and conflict theories offer explanations of society as a whole macro-system and tend to see human behaviour as solely part of that system. For functionalist theorists, behaviour is directed by the norms and values of the social system while for conflict theorists it is determined by economic structures.

World institutionalists suggest that Western ideals and forms of organisations transcend national boundaries and have established themselves in emerging nation states. For these theorists, the Western school is a structure surrounded by popular support and symbols of modernity. World institutionalists attempt to demonstrate the existence of shared cultural and political commitments with regard to modern socialisation. They describe mass schooling as a “political good” which promotes the joining into modern polity and advances meritocratic opportunities. As other structural theorists, world

institutionalists see society as a macro-system, in their case of global dimensions. In their view human behaviour is directed by Western ideals and forms of organisation.

The international viewpoint presented in this chapter sees education as a right for all people and as an undertaking indispensable for personal and social improvement. Basic education is the foundation enabling young people to further education and continue learning throughout life, the prerequisite for economic development, for imparting the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to meet the challenges of the next century and promoting the ideals of tolerance and good will.

Basic learning needs comprise literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving. They also include the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to survive, live and work in dignity, develop oneself, participate in national development, improve the quality of life, continue learning and make informed decisions. Not only should young people have the right to education, this right should include the development of their creative, mental, and physical potential, their ingenuity, imagination and autonomy. In addition to promoting participation in school processes, the quality of these processes has become an important challenge for developing nations as they move toward the twenty-first century<sup>10</sup>. In that perspective the quality challenge refers to an education that needs to be "useful", "decent" and "effective" rather than just schooling and completion of certification.

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<sup>10</sup> In the developing world, universalising access to education and promoting equity remains a most urgent educational challenge at the dawn of the twenty-first century (Colclough & Lewin 1993). In 1990, at the time of the *Conference on Education for All*, with its target of *Education for All by the Year 2000*, it was estimated that more than 960 million adults, two thirds of whom were women were illiterate. It was also estimated that more than 100 million children, including at least 60 million girls, had no access to education. More than 100 million children failed to complete basic education programmes, while millions more satisfied attendance requirements without acquiring essential knowledge and skills (UNESCO, 1990).

The literature acknowledges that in the developing world, school processes take place in difficult conditions and that access to education and equity with regards to participating in educational processes remain the most urgent challenge in developing societies. Furthermore it acknowledges the question of quality as an enduring challenge for educational systems and processes in developing countries. It identifies problems in terms of teaching practices found to be failing to address the learning needs of pupils and challenge them sufficiently. The literature shows a shift in focus from teaching to learning and outlines specific challenges depending on whether educational systems of developing nations are at the “formalism”, “transition” or “meaning” stages.

In the socio-cultural approach adopted for the research, the information presented in this chapter constitutes part of the wide context and other understandings within which participant stakeholders’ experiences and view-points are embedded and will be discussed at the end of the thesis<sup>11</sup>. The next chapter delineates the particular perception of reality upon which this socio-cultural perspective has been conceptualised and designed.

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<sup>11</sup> Other aspects of that wide context are the Mauritian historical and cultural context and the Mauritian ‘official’ understanding, presented in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CONCEPTUAL APPROACH**

The previous chapter outlined micro/structural explanations of the place of education in society and more particularly in developing societies. While some of these perspectives emphasise the importance of consensus, others in contrast, believe that there are fundamental differences of interest between social groups. Despite these differences, it has however been shown that macro/structural perspectives offer explanations of society as a whole and explanations of education as part of, and shaped by, the social or global system. In the previous chapter, I also suggested social action perspectives as pertinent approaches for extending the understanding of Mauritian primary education for several reasons: (i) because social action perspectives focus on small scale interactions rather than society as a whole; (ii) because they do not see human behaviour solely as a reaction or response to the social system and; (iii) because they incorporate context. This chapter expands on these ideas and outlines the distinctive social action approach adopted for this study.

Philosophical views of human behaviour and social reality have influenced both the type of data that researchers of society have collected and the methods they have employed to collect that data. The positivist approach, derived from the work of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), assumes that the behaviour of humans, just like the behaviour of matter, can be objectively measured and observed. The structural theories (functionalist and conflict) described in the previous chapter, can be regarded as positivistic approaches to understanding social reality. In these perspectives, the place

of education in society is perceived as a reaction to the economic infrastructure and functional prerequisite of the social system.

In contrast, according to the social action perspectives outlined first by sociologist Weber (1864-1920), the subject matter of natural and social sciences is fundamentally different. Social action perspectives favour conceptions which start from the ontological and methodological primacy of micro-social situations. They seek to replace the scientific notions of explanation, prediction and control with the notions of understanding, meaning and action.

Positivistic approaches view human behaviour as something determined by impersonal law, operating beyond individual control. Social reality is a self-regulating mechanism. In contrast, social action perspectives hold the view that human behaviour is purposive and that individual members construct and interpret their own actions and opinions. In micro/social action perspectives, humans take part in the creating of society through their own actions. These perspectives begin with the assumption that action is meaningful to those involved and suggest that an understanding of action requires an interpretation of actions themselves and the meanings which participants give to their activities.

Several theorists/researchers have attempted to bridge the apparent gulf between social action (micro) and structural (macro) perspectives. For example, in challenging Durkeim's view that society exists independently of the individuals who make it up (Giddens, 1972), Weber (1958) identified aspects of the social structure such as class and bureaucracy but at the same time argued that these groupings were made up of



individuals carrying out social actions. Schutz (1967), in his phenomenology of the social world, argues for organised contextuality of the social world. For Schutz, the environment, the context and the setting of social action emerge as something towards which action is directed, which is lived and reflected upon rather than being external to social action.

Willis (1977) combined Marxist analysis with an interactionist approach to social action. Using a variety of research methods in his study of a school in a working class housing estate in England in the 1970s, Willis did not just rely upon abstract analysis of the relationship between education and the economic infrastructure. He tried to understand the experience of schooling from the perspectives of the pupils. Giddens (1981, 1984), on the other hand, claims that structure and social action are two sides of the same coin, they form a "duality". For Giddens, social actions create structures and it is through social action that structures are produced, reproduced and survive over time.

Several theorists have also argued for an integration between micro and macro levels of analysis. For Cicourel (1981), a precondition for this integration is to identify the processes which contribute to the creation of macro-structure by the "aggregation" and "integration" of micro events. Collins (1981) argues that macro-sociological reality is composed of the aggregate of micro-situations. He conceives a radical micro-sociology engaged in the empirical reconstruction of social theory and methodology.

The micro/social action perspective which is described above, is considered an appropriate theoretical positioning in order to bring parents, teachers, pupils and educationists' lived experiences and constructs into the understanding of Mauritian

primary education. However, like those theorists/researchers who have tried to bridge the gap between macro and micro understanding of social phenomenon, I suggest the following: (i) The fact that this study examines and provides an interpretation of Mauritian primary education at a certain time in history does not reject that this interpretation is in large part shaped by particulars of the past; (ii) the fact that the study examines Mauritian primary education at the micro-level does not suppose that education is an island in the broader societal sense, isolated from broader societal circumstances, issues and understandings.

I, therefore, propose that the task of bringing school level realities and constructs into the understanding of primary education in the Mauritian context is multi-layered. I propose that it is essential to take into account participants' experiences and world-views but it is also essential to take into account the wider context in which the understanding of these experiences and constructs are embedded.

Although concerned with psychological rather than sociological explanations, Wertsch (1991), in his "socio- cultural approach to mediated action", has devised theoretical tools such as "action", "situatedness", "voices" and "addressivity" which are relevant and useful for the purpose, positioning and conceptualising of this thesis.

For Wertsch (1991):

A socio-cultural approach to mind is to create an account of human mental processes that recognise the essential relationship between these processes and their cultural, historical and institutional settings . . . A fundamental assumption of a socio-cultural approach is that what is to be described and explained is human action...A socio-cultural approach to mind begins with the assumption that action is mediated and that it cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out (pp 1-8 & 20).

Wertsch sees human beings not as individuals but rather as generators of certain types of actions which he calls "communicative action". Wertsch argues that, when action is given analytical priority, human beings are viewed as coming into contact with and creating their surroundings as well as themselves through the actions in which they engage. Thus action, rather than human beings or the environment considered in isolation, provide the entry point into the analysis. As analytical categories, actions and interactions can include what people say, what they say to each other, about each other, about common issues, as well as what they do.

In his explanations of the socio-cultural tenet of "situatedness", Wertsch (1991) draws on Vygotsky's writings and his claims that mental functionings in individuals derive from social life. Taking account of "situatedness", which includes historical, cultural and institutional settings, in other circumstances labelled context or culture, according to Wertsch (1991), does not mean that there is no room for universals. On the contrary, it indicates possibilities of contrast with other perspectives (p. 18).

For the tenets of "voices" and "addressivity", Wertsch this time draws on the work of Bakhtin (1986) who stresses the idea that "voices" always come in a social milieu. "Voices" according to Bakhtin cannot be reduced to an account of vocal auditory signals. Bakhtin's account is of a "speaking consciousness, which applies to written as well as spoken communications and is concerned with the broader issues of a subject's perspective, conceptual horizon intention and world view" (cited in Wertsch 1991, pp. 50-51). Bakhtin also stresses that meaning comes into existence when two or more "voices" come into contact, for example, when the "voice" of a listener responds to the "voice" of a speaker. In a Bakhtinian approach, "any utterance is a link in the chain of

communication ... [they] are not indifferent to one another, are not self sufficient. They are aware of and mutually reflect one another" (cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 52-53).

"Addressee", another Bakhtinian concept, need not be individuals engaged in concrete conversations. "Addressee" can be temporally, spatially and socially distant.

Addressee can be an immediate participant interlocutor in an every day dialogue, a differentiated collective of specialists in some particular area, a more or less differentiated public, ethnic group, contemporaries, like minded people, opponents and enemies, a subordinate, a superior, someone who is lower, higher, familiar, foreign and so forth. And, it can also be an indefinite unconcretised other (Bakhtin, 1986, p.95).

Paraphrasing Wertsch (1991), I propose a socio-cultural approach for extending the understanding of primary education in one developing country, Mauritius, in which I create an account of stakeholders' experiences and view-points that recognise the essential relationship between these processes and their cultural, historical and institutional settings.

In this study, the notion of context takes two forms one which I call the broad context and the other participants' personal context. The interpretation of school level realities and view-points as a contribution to the understanding of Mauritian primary education is situated in a broad context, which comprises other understandings as well as societal, historical, institutional circumstances and patterns.

Other understandings comprise a macro/structural sociological understanding of the place of primary education in developing societies. They also comprise expressions of ideals and principles about the place, ideals, principles and challenges of primary

education in developing societies. These understandings which form part of the broad context have been presented in the preceding chapter. Other understandings comprise the official/governmental discourse about the place and issues of Mauritian primary education. Those understandings are outlined in Chapter Five.

The Mauritian context, its societal, historical and institutional circumstances and patterns is another important aspect of the broad context and is necessary to locate and interpret practices, experiences and view-points of contemporary Mauritian primary education. Mauritian education is to be understood in that sense, as located on a continuum where historical particulars form the base upon which the present experiencing of Mauritian primary education is construed. The circumstances, peoples, events and cultural patterns, together with the ways in which the Mauritian education system and more particularly primary system have evolved and the ways it is organised, are important to know in order to locate and interpret an understanding of a contemporary phenomenon such as education. They are also important to know in order to locate experiences and view-points of Mauritian primary education. The realities of primary education in the two schools chosen for the study and the view-points expressed by participants which constitute the research findings, will be discussed against these national aspects of broad context which are presented in Chapter Five.

Personal context is another element thought to be necessary in order to locate practices, experiences and view-points of primary education. Personal context takes two forms: *position* and *life history*. The perspective from which participants operate in their capacities as teachers, parents, head teachers or educationists is fundamental in the shaping and framing of the ways in which they experience and construe primary

education and the interpretation of these experiences and constructs. The nature of their role as parents, teachers, pupils and educationists, their particular vested interest embedded in that role and positioning shape the ways in which they experience and construe primary education. For example, it is through their personal and or professional experience and circumstances that participants/stakeholders experience and prioritise what counts for them as issues and challenges in Mauritian primary education.

Asking participants to place their experiencing and understanding of primary education in the context of their personal history is an important methodological element in the research design of this study. Present understanding is to a certain extent regulated and sustained by personal experiences and circumstances. Constitutive events in past family, school and work experiences provide a context upon which present experiences and understandings of primary education can be built.

The realities of primary education in the two schools chosen for the study and the view-points expressed by all research participants constituting the research findings will be discussed against these aspects of personal context. Chapter Four further explains the notion of personal context.

This research aims to show how school level processes, and participant stakeholders' view-points and experiences contribute to describing and extending the understanding of Mauritian primary education. Using a socio-cultural approach, it gives analytical priority to participant stakeholders' "actions" and "voices" and takes into account the wider contexts in which these are embedded. The concept of "situatedness" serves to locate participant stakeholders' actions and voices in the historical, cultural,

organisational patterns and circumstances of their personal lives. This same concept also makes it possible to analyse school processes, experiences and participants' view-points alongside other (theoretical and international) understandings of primary education. In using the concept of "addressivity", the research recognises that it is by using a broad array of points of view and through the interactivity of participant stakeholders' actions and voices that an understanding of Mauritian primary education may be achieved.

Having delineated the particular perception of reality upon which the research has been conceptualised and designed, the next chapter turns to the qualitative methods used to support the study's socio-cultural approach.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND DESIGN

The purpose of the inquiry was to describe and interpret experiences and view-points related to Mauritian primary education, as lived expressions of various Mauritian 'stakeholders' and to describe and interpret the interactivity of these experiences and view-points. The introductory focus of data collection has therefore been on what participants did and said, rather than on the environment or the participants considered in isolation.

An ethnographic design has been selected as an appropriate methodological strategy for the research purpose and its specific focus on participants' actions. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) define the process of ethnography as follows:

Ethnographic design mandates investigatory strategies conducive to cultural reconstruction. First, the strategies used, elicit phenomenological data; they represent the world-view of the participants being investigated, and participants' constructs are used to structure the research. Second, ethnographic research strategies are empirical and naturalistic. Participant and non- participant observations are used to acquire first hand, sensory accounts of phenomena as they occur in real world settings and investigators take care to avoid purposive manipulation of variables in the study. Third, ethnographic research is holistic. Ethnographers seek to construct descriptions of total phenomena within their various contexts and to generate from these descriptions the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences that affect human behaviour toward and belief about the phenomena. Finally, ethnography is multi-modal or eclectic; ethnographic researchers use a variety of research techniques to amass their data (Goetz & LeCompte 1984, pp. 3-4).

The strategies used in the inquiry include all of these aspects. Investigation was undertaken in schools and in participants' places of work and on occasions in homes.



The process of inquiry consisted of observing natural, non-manipulated processes as they are experienced in every day lives. It has also consisted of recording view-points construed by participants as they described their own experiences of Mauritian primary education and expressed their understanding of Mauritian primary education.

Moreover, the research was "multimodal". It has used observation in order to document the physical characteristics of Mauritian primary school settings, to describe the people who work and frequent these schools, to document routines, teaching and learning processes and the effects these processes have on pupils' experience of schooling. The research method used in-depth interviews in order to bring participants' constructs into the understanding of Mauritian primary education and document the issues and priorities which participants brought into this understanding. The research has also used stories and drawings created by children, viewed in this research as important participants, holders of valid and legitimate knowledge about primary education, in order to elicit their own brand of understanding of Mauritian primary education.

The research was "holistic" because it incorporated multiple "actions" and "voices" into the understanding of Mauritian primary education. Moreover, it was "holistic" because data collection techniques have accessed the three domains usually associated with human action:

- The domain of manifest behaviour such as school activities observed in the school setting.
- The domain of internal or conscious processes such as those recounted by

participants during interviews and projected in children's stories and drawings.

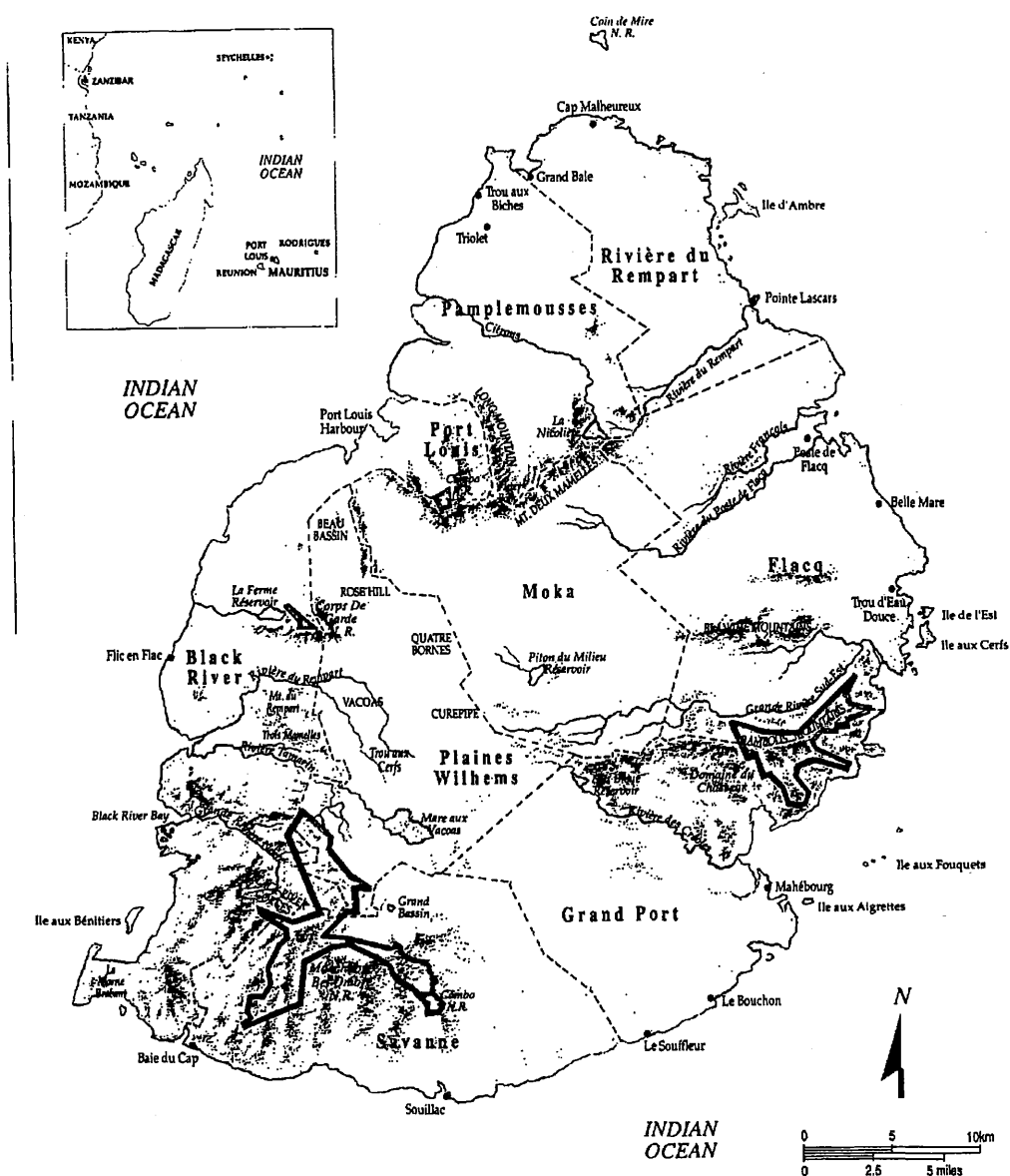
- The domain of social meaning such as observed in schools and solicited from participants during interviews, stories and drawings.

Two periods of field-work were conducted in Mauritius in order to collect data. The purpose of the first visit, lasting four weeks in November 1995, was to establish contact with potential participants, select two schools in which to ground field-work and generally prepare for the second visit. The second visit was a very intensive period of work lasting three months March/April/May 1996, during which I completely immersed myself in the field. One month was spent in an urban school, another month was spent in a rural school, in both cases observing, conducting interviews, talking with and interviewing children, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and generally participating in the schools' every day activities, sometimes taking the role of a teacher. The third month was spent meeting and interviewing individual participants who had a professional educational interest in government and non-governmental organisations.

The following sections present and discuss the research methodology in more detail. They describe the selection of research sites and participants, the extent of participation in the research, the techniques and procedures utilised for collecting and analysing data and considerations relating to the reliability and validity of findings and interpretations.

## Selection of sites and participants

FIGURE 1: MAP OF MAURITIUS



Source: Proust, A. and Mountain, A. (1995). *This is Mauritius*. London: New Holland Publishers LTD.

## **Sites**

The two schools were selected in consultation with staff at the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE). They were selected purposely to reflect (not represent) the rich fabric of Mauritian society within the Mauritian primary school system. The characteristics of many other schools are embodied in these two schools. The schools are middlemost in most aspects. There is nothing specifically unique nor extreme in terms of their size, the ethnic, religious and socio-economic characteristics of their population, availability of resources, teaching practices and performance at examinations. However, in order to “maximise variation” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.178), one school has been selected from the rural area and the other school from the urban area<sup>12</sup>. Sites outside the two schools comprised Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), the Beau-Bassin Teacher Training Centre, the Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES), The Ministry of Education, and the Roman Catholic Authority (RCA). These sites, except the Mauritius Institute of Education where I was kindly given office space, were visited to conduct interviews with participants.

## **Participants**

In most literature concerning quantitative research methodologies literature, the selection of participants is referred to as “sample selection”. The use of the word “sample” is avoided in this research for reasons best captured in what follows:

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<sup>12</sup> Mauritius spans some 60 km North to South and some 40 km West to East. Public transport, in the form of buses, services all parts of the island. For these reasons in Mauritius, the distinction between rural and urban does not take the dimensions experienced in some other countries with remote and inaccessible regions. Most of the Mauritian country side is covered with sugar cane plantation and some mountain ranges. Mauritians live in the big towns of Plaine Wilhems and the big villages and small towns of other districts, all within a bus ride from large centres. Given these characteristics, it could therefore be said that, in the case of Mauritius, ‘urban’ is very urban and that ‘rural’ means less urban. In the study, the school known under the fictitious name of Four Hills is located in the urban area of Plaines Wilhems and the school known as Terre Bleue is located in a big village in the district of Moka.

If all men were strictly equal, no man could serve as an abstraction of mankind. He would be only a sample. However, given the great variety of human beings, mankind can be abstracted through the presentation of particular persons, who embody the nature of many or all people in important respects. Although they are individuals of flesh and blood, such persons can serve, like the players in Hamlet, as the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time (Arnheim, 1969, p.169).

In this study, participants are viewed as individuals who “embody the nature of many people in important aspects”. They are individuals who reflect rather than represent the understanding of Mauritian primary education. Their experiences and opinions therefore serve as “the abstracts”, not the sample, of that understanding, just as sites and participants were selected purposely. Several considerations, outlined in what follows, have informed their selection.

A multiplicity of perspectives as well as in-depth insights at the grassroots level were thought essential considerations in order to extend understanding of Mauritian primary education. The notion of “maximum variation” and the notion of “intensity” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.178) are important notions in that regard. The selection of research participants has been based on these notions. The notion of “maximum variation” is to be understood as aiming to include a variety of research participants so as to provide the broadest base for achieving understanding of Mauritian primary education. The notion of “intensity” is understood as aiming to include in the research, participants who can exemplify and provide “information-rich” cases and contribute their own understanding of Mauritian primary education deeply, but not extremely. As a result of these considerations the following broad criteria applied to the selection of participants:

- They were stakeholders’ of Mauritian primary education.

- They offered “variation” in the understanding of Mauritian primary education.
- They exemplified and /or contributed “rich information” with regard to the understanding of Mauritian primary education.

Table 5 shows who the participants were and outlines the rationale utilised for their selection.

**TABLE 5: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: COMPOSITION AND RATIONALE FOR SELECTION**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>School-based participants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils all grades</li> <li>• Teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General purpose teachers</li> <li>Oriental languages teachers</li> <li>Physical education teachers</li> <li>Trainee teachers</li> <li>Head and deputy head teachers</li> </ul> </li> <li>• School clerk also known as secretary</li> <li>• Parents</li> </ul>	<p>Selected to obtain a broad range of experiences and view-points from within the schools' settings. They included:</p> <p>Diverse types of individuals who, through their profession or daily occupation, had a direct involvement in Mauritian primary education and individuals whose children were pupils in the two selected schools.</p> <p>These individuals contributed their daily experiences and view-points to the understanding of Mauritian primary education</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outside-school participants</b> (Labelled “educationists” in the research)</p> <p>Individuals from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE)</li> <li>Teacher Training Centre (TTC)</li> <li>Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES)</li> <li>Ministry of Education</li> <li>Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCEA)</li> <li>NGO'S</li> </ul>	<p>Selected to broaden the range of experiences and view-points from outside the schools settings. They included:</p> <p>Diverse individuals professionally involved in aspects of Mauritian primary education.</p> <p>These individuals contributed their informed view-points to the understanding of Mauritian primary education.</p> <p>All were schooled in Mauritian primary schools, some had taught in Mauritian primary schools. Some had children in Mauritian primary schools and all work in occupations directly related to some aspect of Mauritian primary education.</p> <p>The educationist group counts as the voice that reflects a broader Mauritian understanding of the present circumstances and issues of Mauritian primary education.</p>

The rationale for the selection of participants, as stated earlier, was to obtain a broad range of experiences and view-points so as to document the realities of Mauritian primary education and obtain multiple perspectives of the understanding of Mauritian primary education. A combination of the experiences and view-points of school and outside school participants/stakeholders was thought necessary so as to provide the broadest base for achieving these aims and offer maximum variation.

Decision for doing so was made prior to field-work but a more precise selection of participants was undertaken as field-work progressed and research questions were formulated and refined. For example, the delineation between diverse teachers, diverse levels of pupils, diverse outside school participants became clearer in the course of field-work as my understanding of school settings and activities increased. I selected school-based participants during the set periods of time spent in the schools. Potential outside school participants (educationists), on the other hand, were suggested by MIE staff and field-work supervisor. On some occasions, in what is known as a “snowballing process”, they were also suggested by other participants.

The school-based participants were composed of pupils, parents, teachers and a school clerk also referred to as secretary. The outside school participants comprised lecturing and non-lecturing individuals from national institutions: MIE, MES, RCEA, the Mauritian Ministry of Education, NGOs and private sector. All were thought to be stakeholders in Mauritian primary education for the following reasons.

Pupils were included as participants because they are the most numerous stakeholders in regards to primary education, because their daily lives are in great part structured by

activities related to primary education and because their future to some extent depends on their primary education. They were included because, in principle, primary education is intended for them. Parents, on the other hand were included because they have themselves been schooled in the Mauritian primary education system, because primary education is an important aspect of their children's daily lives and an important factor for their children's future.

Teachers and the school clerk were included as participants because, as is the case for pupils, primary education activities structure their daily work and as parents they have themselves experienced Mauritian primary education as pupils. They were also included because they earn their living and position in society from working in the field of primary education.

Similarly, individuals from MIE, MES, RCEA, Ministry of Education and NGOs were included as participants to give their informed viewpoint about primary education in Mauritius in general, rather than their view about education in the two selected schools. They were chosen because all earned their living and position in society from working in the field of education and most worked in occupations directly related to Mauritian primary education (eg training, inspection, curriculum development, administration). Some had taught in Mauritian primary education and most, but not all, had children in Mauritian government primary schools.

Educationists were chosen to reflect a broader Mauritian understanding of the present circumstances and issues of Mauritian primary education.



## **Extent and degrees of participation**

The research has, to varying degrees, involved the pupils and teachers of the two schools. One school had approximately 950 pupils and 45 teachers. The other school had approximately 320 pupils and 25 teachers. It has also involved some parents from these two schools and outside school participants labelled educationists in this research. The following sections explain what is meant by participation and clarify the extent and degrees of participation of these diverse people.

I had informal conversations with all teachers and non-teaching staff in both schools. Most of these conversations took place at school. In addition, I interviewed twenty-three teachers for durations ranging between one and three hours. Among these twenty-three teachers, there were two oriental language teachers, one trainee teacher, one physical education teacher, two deputy head teachers and two head teachers. I also interviewed one school secretary. In both schools I spent time observing in classrooms, in some cases on several occasions, in most classrooms for the full day and in all cases never less than half a day. In the rural school I observed in all classrooms. In the larger urban school I observed in seventy-five per cent of all classrooms. In total, I observed fifty teachers while they were teaching.

During observation in classrooms, I participated in, or simply observed, the activities of approximately 1000 primary pupils. Two pupils, in separate classrooms, were observed continuously for a full day as part of an in-depth study. In addition, I had informal conversations with large numbers of children as I sat in the playgrounds during the lunch hour and breaks. I also walked to and from school with some of them and engaged in conversation during that time. Two hundred pupils from the two schools

participated in the research by providing drawings. Fourteen others participated in the research by providing stories depicting their day at school and seventeen participated in the research by providing a written imaginary, dialogue between themselves and a younger sibling who did not want to go to school.

I had informal conversations with approximately fifty parents in and outside school settings. In addition, I conducted an informal group discussion with nine parents in the school yard, in-depth interviews with ten other parents, some in school, others in their homes for times ranging between one and two hours in length.

I conducted in-depth interviews with seventeen educationists for times ranging between one and two hours in length.

Table 6 summarises the extent and degree of participants' involvement in the research. It also specifies to which school participants belong. In the table FH stands for the larger urban school which has been given the fictitious name of Four Hills in the report. TB stands for the smaller rural school which has been given the fictitious name of Terre Bleue in the report. These two schools were not selected for comparative purposes. The fact that one is in the urban area and the other in the rural area serves a purpose of "maximum variation". The inclusion of FH and TB in the table should, therefore, not be read in comparative mode.

**TABLE 6: EXTENT AND DEGREE OF PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE RESEARCH**

TYPES OF DATA COLLECTING ACTIVITY	TYPES AND NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS
<b>OBSERVATIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In classrooms For 1/day, full-day or several days</li> <li>Full-day individual focus</li> <li>In school yards; at school gates; walking to and from schools</li> <li>In school offices</li> </ul>	<p>1000 pupils (TB 1/3, FH 2/3) 55 teachers (TB 25, FH 30)</p> <p>2 STD VI pupils (TB) 2 STD VI general purpose teachers (TB)</p> <p>Pupils, parents, teaching and non teaching staff (FH and TB)</p> <p>Pupils parents, teaching and non teaching staff (FH and TB)</p>
<b>VERBAL COMMUNICATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal conversations In and outside schools settings</li> <li>In –depth interviews In and outside schools settings Lasting 1 hr. to 3 hrs.</li> </ul>	<p>All teachers (70) (FH, TB) Children (FH, TB) Parents (50) (FH, TB) Parents as a group (9) (TB)</p> <p><b>TEACHERS: Total (23)</b> Head teachers (2) (FH, TB) Deputy head teacher (2) (FH, TB) Oriental language teachers (2) (FH, TB) Teacher trainee (1) (FH) Physical education teacher (1) (FH) General purpose teachers (15) (TB)</p> <p><b>OTHER SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS: Total (11)</b> School secretary (1) (FH) Parents (10) (6 FH, 4 TB)</p> <p><b>OUTSIDE SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS: Total (17)</b> Individuals from MIE, MES, Ministry of Education, RCEA and NGO's (17)</p>
<b>DRAWINGS &amp; STORIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drawings of school and class and cartoons of 'a day at school'</li> <li>Stories: 'A day at school'</li> <li>Stories: Imaginary dialogue</li> </ul>	<p>Selection of pupils of all grades from both schools (FH, TB) <b>Total (200)</b></p> <p>STD V and STD VI pupils (FH, TB) <b>Total (14)</b></p> <p>STD V and STD VI pupils (FH, TB) <b>Total (17)</b></p>

## **Data collection techniques**

The purpose of the field work was to immerse myself in the school context in Mauritius, and to document processes and view points related to Mauritian primary education as they were lived and expressed by Mauritian stakeholders in the 'game' of primary education.

I spent a full month in Four Hills and another full month in Terre Bleue. In both cases, I went to school every day, for the full day, so as to fit into the routine of school activities and become part of the schools (even for a short time). I realised the degree of my acceptance when, in both schools, I was asked to take a class when the teacher was absent. Such favours, I believe, are not asked of complete strangers nor of occasional visitors.

My activities in these schools consisted of an amicable combination of doing what was required for my research, described above and making myself useful to people in the school. I sat in classrooms, observed teaching and learning activities, helped and sometimes taught. I spent time in playgrounds at the beginning and end of school days as well as during recesses, observing comings and goings, watching children at play, chatting with them and with parents waiting to pick up or drop off their children. I sat in staff rooms and offices talking with whoever happened to be there at that time, helping with exam preparations and marking. I spent time sitting on a chair in the shade of trees, a place which jokingly became known as my 'office', and where I interviewed children, parents and teachers. At the end of the day, I walked out of the school with everyone else and visited some pupils and parents in their homes.

These activities were not rushed. As time went by, I became visible yet unobtrusive. Once the initial curiosity my presence in the school provoked had gone and once it was realised that I was not going to change anything in anyone's daily routine, children would come and ask me, as they would any other teacher, to unlock a door. Parents would ask me to confirm that tomorrow was "dentist's day", and teachers would resume their mundane conversations in staff rooms and classrooms. The following sections outline the research techniques in detail.

### **Observing**

Personal observation was an important data collecting activity in the school settings. I observed in the playgrounds, classrooms and offices and recorded descriptions of these settings, of the routines, activities and interactions that took place in these settings and of the people who participated in those activities. Observational methods varied over time according to specific situations and focus. They included non-participant and participant observations and the recording of copious notes in field books.

Non-participant observations consisted of direct observations of classroom activities<sup>13</sup>. By this time in my field-work, my presence was no longer a novelty and I was accepted as background in the school. On those occasions I was an unobtrusive observer, sitting at the back of classrooms where I memorised or directly recorded detailed and representative accounts of what people did, said and how they said it<sup>14</sup>. These observations focussed on participants' behaviour rather than the meaning participants

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<sup>13</sup> I also made direct observations in offices and playgrounds.

<sup>14</sup> In many cases, so as not to perturb teachers and disrupt classes, notes were not written whilst observing. In those cases, following a sitting in a classroom I would find a quiet place where I could write concise notes used to structure and serve as reminders for the writing of detailed observational notes in field books. On occasions, notes were written as I observed. In all cases, and as explained earlier in the ethics section of Chapter One, teachers knew that I was not writing a report about them to their superiors.

attach to their actions and as such, participants were not interrupted to seek clarifications. Over-time, these direct observations became more focussed and selective. For example, specific observations generated detailed data on the nature of work that regulates teachers' and pupils' experience of primary education. They also generated comparative data relating to pupils' experience of school and classroom activities.

In other cases, observations were made during times in which I helped teachers in classrooms, staff in the office and during times in which I taught and participated in school activities such as outings and sports. The emphasis in these participant-observations was broader than in non-participant ones. During those participant observations, I was able to ask questions and clarifications in regards to the meaning participants impart to their actions.

Observational notes were sometimes written as observation progressed. In other cases, as mentioned earlier, they were written in condensed form at opportune times during the day and used as prompts for the writing of more detailed notes. Detailed observational notes were recorded daily in the field journals. They were written at the end of the day and always on the day of observation. In addition to descriptions and recordings of informal conversations, these notes contained the questions I asked myself as field-work progressed, the ideas and methodological and analytical decisions that were generated during the day. These aspects will be detailed further in the analysis section.

### **Verbal communication**

Verbal communication involved opportunistic, informal conversations and the conducting and tape recording of in-depth, formally organised interviews. Informal conversations took place continuously throughout fieldwork. The guiding principle underpinning informal and in-depth interviews was the fact that I was to learn from participants. I therefore listened a great deal. I asked for clarifications or to be shown things. Aspects of informal conversations relevant to the research were noted in the field book. In-depth interviews on the other hand were tape recorded and later transcribed.

A three step interview approach, based on Seidman (1991) was adopted with both school-based and outside school participants. These interviews were conducted in French, English or Creole<sup>15</sup> according to participants' preference. The length and sequence of interviews varied. Because I was present in the school it was relatively easy to conduct three separate interviews with teachers, during their free time, each lasting about one hour. In other cases, interviews one and two were conducted in one setting (lasting between 1/2 hour to 1 hour) leaving interview three for a second setting (also lasting between 1/2 hour to 1 hour). This second option was the case for some teachers, HTs, DHTs, some parents and some outside school informants. With other informants, the three interviews were combined, becoming three steps within one setting. This was the case with some parents and most outside school participants. These three step interviews lasted between one hour and two hours.

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<sup>15</sup> I am fluent in both French and English and able to follow what is said in Creole, but do not speak it fluently. Because of the similarities between French and Creole, Mauritians who cannot speak French fluently are often able to follow what is said to them in French. Interviews with these peoples took the following form. I asked my questions in French and on occasions was helped by a teacher or a parent who would repeat my questions in Creole. Participants responded in Creole. These interviews were audio-recorded and were later transcribed and translated into French by a fluent Creole speaker.

Despite these variations, the governing and very important principle guiding the structure and undertaking of interviews was that communication of understanding of Mauritian primary education could be productive, only if the foundation for that communication had been established. Making sense of Mauritian primary education required that participants looked at their own past and present experiences of Mauritian primary education. The combination of exploring the past and describing the details of present experience established conditions for participants to reflect upon and reveal their own understanding of Mauritian primary education. The details of what the three interviews or steps consisted of is presented in the following.

A first interview/step, "Focussed life history" put participants' experiences in context, by asking them to tell as much as possible about themselves (up until the time they became teachers, administrators, parents of primary school age children...). I asked all participants to tell me about their own primary schooling experience. I also asked participants who work in primary schools, or in occupations related to primary education, to tell me how they came to do that job. The rationale of asking these questions about past experience has been to facilitate participants' reconstruction of a range of constitutive events in their past family, school, and work experience, that place their experience and understanding of primary education in the context of their own lives.

The purpose of the second interview/step, "The details of experience" was to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present experience as related to primary education. During these interviews, participants were asked to reconstruct details of what they actually do in their 'job'. I asked school-based participants to



reconstruct the activities of a day (for children see further down). For example, I said: "If I followed you throughout the day what would I see you doing?" I asked outside school participants who work in occupations related to primary education to describe their work. For example, I asked: "What does teacher training consists of?" or "How do you go about producing a primary school text book?" I asked parents to describe how they organise their children's activities such as preparing them for school; how they organise their children after school; and their children's activities during week-ends. Opinions were not sought at this point, but rather the details of experience upon which opinions could be built in the third interview/ step (even if in some cases these details of experience were not the focus of the inquiry).

In the third interview/step, "Reflection on meaning", participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Questions were phrased as such: "Given what you have said about your own experience of primary education and given what you have said about your work now, how do you understand Mauritian primary education?"

"What sense does it make to you as a parent, as a teacher?" "What are your concerns?"

"What, according to you, is it all about?" During these third interviews/steps, participants were also asked to clarify or expand on words they themselves had used in previous communication. These third interviews/steps addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life. They sought participants' beliefs and values on aspects of Mauritian primary education, what for them was at stake and to reveal participants' own understanding of Mauritian primary education.

### Children's drawings and stories

In the research, drawing has been utilised as a medium to elicit pupils' understanding of primary education. This method is innovative and several considerations have informed its selection. One of these considerations is the awareness that some children are shy, or may not be used to expressing their opinion, or may find it difficult to express themselves in ways other than by answering yes or no to questions put to them. These are important aspects to be considered when outsiders seek information from children and may point to the realisation that audio-recorded, lengthy in-depth interviews, such as those utilised for adults, may not be the most adequate method in order to seek children's view-points<sup>16</sup>.

There is also the observation that most children often capture in their drawings the character of people and things and whatever they want to portray by a few highly abstract lines. Drawing is a task which for most children is natural, not threatening and is easier to perform than talking. Mc Niff (1981) argues for example that:

Drawing is not a process of imitating or copying the physical world, but rather of synthesizing life experiences. Art then becomes a means through which the child can communicate about those phenomena which are too complex to describe verbally, but which are being perceived and integrated into the child organization of reality (p. 29).

Selecting drawing as a medium for eliciting children's views has also been informed by perception theory. Arnheim (1969) in his work on *Visual Thinking* claims that pictorial images are a product of the mind rather than a deposit of the physical object and that thinking may therefore take place in the realm of images. Pictorial representations such

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<sup>16</sup> Informal conversations are different. They are not recorded, they take place in natural settings.

as drawings and paintings will therefore serve several purposes: (a) to translate finished thoughts into visible models; (b) to relate to mental images, the types which often occur below the level of consciousness which are hard to describe and easily disturbed. As such, pictorial representations can be suitable instruments of abstract reasoning and point to some of the dimensions of thought they can represent.

Moreover, drawings are like a mirror of social images (Wilson & Wilson, 1977, 1979).

In their recent work using drawings as a cultural text. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchel (1995), for example, state that:

Because a picture can communicate simultaneously on many levels, drawings are useful not only as iconic images, but also as layered paintings that hide or combine other social, cultural images. An analysis of drawings can thus reveal aspects of our personal and social knowledge – how we see the world, how we feel, and what we can imagine that have largely been ignored (p.19).

It is for all of these reasons, that drawing was selected as an illuminating medium in order to collect data related to children's understanding of their primary education.

I asked individuals or small groups of pupils, as I was talking to them in the school yard and as I participated in class activities, to draw their images for me. I also asked classes as a group when teaching or visiting them. In lower grades, teachers on occasions gave children some time in order to draw while I was visiting the class. Most other times pupils drew in their free time or at home. I asked pupils to draw the school, class or a cartoon of their day at school. As I was seeking Mauritian pupils' understanding of Mauritian primary education, my directives concerning what to draw were always minimalist, taking care not to influence pupils in their representations. In the cases

where the drawings were done in class and in the presence of teachers, I had to ask teachers not to tell children what to draw and sometimes, had to diplomatically stop them from doing so while also explaining the reasons for not giving ideas to pupils of what to draw. Children were pleased to offer drawings and as a result there is a plethora of these images.

Some older pupils (Standards V and VI) wrote stories as an alternative to drawing. These pupils did not mind writing stories providing these were not homework to be marked. In asking children to write stories, like drawings, I was seeking their understanding of Mauritian primary education. For that purpose, I gave pupils the choice between writing about their day at school or writing an imaginary dialogue between themselves or a parent and a younger sibling who does not want to go to school. As with drawings, I gave minimum instructions in regards to what the stories should include. Pupils could choose the language in which to write these stories. Two thirds were written in French, the remainder in English. None were written in Creole<sup>17</sup>. Writing stories, as with drawing gave pupils the opportunity and freedom to express themselves in their own terms.

The techniques utilised in order to document processes and view points related to the understanding of Mauritian primary education are summarised in Table 7.

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<sup>17</sup> Pupils were very surprised when I gave Creole as an option for writing their story. Some laughed uncomfortably saying that Creole was for speaking not writing. Some teachers, when hearing my instructions, made similar comments saying that pupils should write in English or French, but not Creole.

**TABLE 7: DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES**

<b>TECHNIQUES</b>	<b>STRUCTURE</b>	<b>SPECIFIC INTENT</b>
<b>Observations</b>	Participant observations in school settings & direct / selective / focussed observations in class settings	Document school routines, activities, interactions, descriptions of settings and participants & learn what questions lay behind participants' actions and interactions
<b>Verbal communication</b>	Informal conversations  Interview/step 1: focussed life history Interview/step 2: details of experience Interview/step 3: reflection on meaning	Clarify researcher's and participants' understandings of Mauritian primary education  Record view-points about Mauritian primary education that is built upon the details of participants' own lives and experiences
<b>Drawings</b>	School Classroom A day at school (cartoon)	Document dominant features of pupils' experiences of school and point to their understanding of primary education
<b>Stories</b>	Account of a day at school Imaginary dialogue between siblings	Document dominant features of pupils' experiences of school and their understanding of primary education

### **Data analysis procedures**

Because the research is embedded in the interpretive paradigm, data analysis has been emergent and inductive in nature. My aim has been to employ methods of analysis that would formally identify themes and construct ideas from the data itself. Units of analysis were, therefore, not predetermined. They evolved from the data according to their meaning and unfolded during the various stages of data analysis, which was approached in two ways. First, there was analysis I undertook as data was collected and second, I conducted a more systematic analysis at completion of field- work. Analysis stages and procedures are explained further.

### **Analysis concurrent with data collection**

Analysis of observational data has been concurrent with data collection and was recorded in field books in the form of notes and comments. In my approach, I followed Spradley's (1980) advice that "rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people" (p.3). I learnt from participants by observing them and listening to them and along with descriptive notes, wrote comments in the field book at the end of the day to record insights provided by participants and to remind me of what questions to ask and what meaning to clarify next.

The comments I wrote in field journals also included the decisions that I made in order to narrow observations. One annotation for example shows that two weeks into fieldwork, I decided that the nature of the experience in primary education was an interesting and important theme to follow. Other annotations informed the leads and specific foci that I decided to follow in light of previous observations. For instance, a memo of that sort asks whether a practice observed in a lower grade can similarly be observed in an upper grade. Another memo comments about contrasts in pupils' experience of primary education. On occasions, comments have consisted of hunches. For example, in several instances, I remarked that whatever teachers asked of pupils always seemed to be aimed at the more able students. On occasions, this particular and other thoughts were put to other participants who would confirm or disagree with them, in all cases explaining how they saw it and thus furthering my understanding of classroom dynamics.

The three interviews/steps approach explained earlier remained consistent for all participants. In that approach, interviewing and analysis processes were kept separate because I wanted to avoid imposing meaning from one participant to the next. The three interviews/steps approach was both open and structured so as to generate phenomenological data leading to the discovery of participants' understanding of Mauritian primary education.

During interviews, my concern has been to maximise depth of meaning rather than change course in interviewing. To that end and especially when interviews were in two or three parts, I would listen to the first or second interview prior to conducting the following one and would note the aspects I wanted participants to develop further in the next interview. I asked participants to tell me more, to expand rather than justify themselves, their thoughts or opinions. For example, I would say: "In the previous conversation you told me that you want your son and daughter to go to a "good college". "Tell me more about 'good colleges'". In other cases I would add: "Other people tell me that 'good colleges' are such and such a thing to them. Is that so for you too?" Similarly, I would, for example say to a teacher: "In the previous conversation you mentioned 'low elements'. What do you mean by 'low elements'? "Could you tell me more about them?"

Analysis concurrent with data analysis can therefore be summarised as consisting of recording insights and decisions in regards to the narrowing, the deepening and the focus of the research. Research questions started to be more clearly formulated at that time.

### **Systematic analysis**

Analysis completed at the end of data collection has also been inductive. It has entailed several procedures derived from the work of LeCompte and Preissle (1993), Pitman and Maxwell (1992), Seidman (1991), Tesch (1990) and Bogdan and Biklen (1992; 1982). Analysis has consisted of a systematic process of selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising and interpreting data leading to the discovery of the priorities, beliefs and practices which combine to constitute the understanding of Mauritian primary education. The data analysis procedures undertaken for set periods of time at completion of field-work included observational data, interviews, drawings and stories.

I first read the three field books in totality in order to get a global perspective of observational material and to achieve the following: to index observational data by applying as many categories as possible; to establish an easy retrieval system of that data for future use; to detect themes and patterns of analysis; and to suggest lines of argument. This first reading of observational data produced fourteen broad categories and numerous sub-categories. This categorisation, similar to the subject index found at the end of books, was displayed on a large piece of paper. Page and field book numbers were also noted alongside these categories. The broad categories and related information were then moved onto separate files. The data corresponding to these categories and subcategories was re-read leading to the finding of additional categories. Pages and field books numbers were also noted alongside categories. Depending on the type of data, I then proceeded to draw cognitive mapping diagrams (eg. teachers' practices) or present data in table form (eg. data produced by shadow studies of pupils and teachers).



I read and re-read all interview transcripts in order to get a global perspective of that material. Following reading, the first step was to copy interviews into a new file in the computer and winnow any segments not relevant to the research at hand. At times, for example, during interviews some participants had diverged from the original purpose of the interview. In spite of the fact that what they were talking about had only a vague relation to the original purpose of the interview, I would not interrupt (within limits of course) believing that these comments served a bridging purpose between ideas. These kinds of comments had served their purpose and were then erased during the winnowing process. All transcripts were reduced in that manner.

The initial treatment of interview data has also involved selecting passages believed to be particularly interesting for display. These excerpts of data, which I called "vignettes", were copied into a new file ready to be used for data display.

Systematic analysis of interview data was trialled on four interviews (head teacher, specialist teacher, parent and one educationist) in order to get the categorisation of interview data started. To this end, I carved text segments out of each of these four interviews in such a way that the segments retained their original meaning even out of context. This was done on the computer, each segment forming a paragraph. A short descriptive statement was then applied to each segment. Each interview produced between 25 and 50 segments. These short descriptive statements were then written on a large piece of paper and a symbol was applied against each one. For example, any statement having something to do with examinations would get a triangle, any statement having something to do with language would get a circle or any statement having anything to do with interactions would get a cross and so forth. Statements with the

same symbol were then clustered. The symbols (about fifteen) gave rise to the first categories. I then established a list of major categories, important categories and leftover categories and coded them. Using the computer, these codes were in turn applied against each segment of the four interviews.

Segmenting and coding procedures were then applied to all other interviews. I then adjusted and refined coding as I went along. Segments ended having between one and four codes. Once all interview data had been segmented and coded in that manner, I then opened a file for each category and using the computer copy and paste facility, I then lifted segments out of their original interview context and recontextualised them in these new files<sup>18</sup>. Segments with several codes were copied in different files.

Most of the drawings<sup>19</sup> were looked at and analysed by three Mauritian art/education and psycho/educational professionals<sup>20</sup>. First, they examined 80 drawings. They did so together without me and wrote a statement about each drawing. We then met, during which time they further commented on the drawings and gave me the written statements. A further 60 drawings were examined during another visit when we sat around a table discussing drawings and sharing impressions. This conversation was audio-recorded. The statements and comments were analysed like text and categories were attached to them.

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<sup>18</sup> I was very careful to note participants' coded name on each segment so that I would be able to re-contextualise each segment in its original interview context if necessary.

<sup>19</sup> Each drawing was numbered as it was given to me and inserted in a plastic pocket for easy display and preservation.

<sup>20</sup> I wanted to include Mauritian professionals into the analysis of drawings for reliability reasons and this had to be done while I was still in Mauritius. I did not change anything in relation to the collection of drawings as a result of this early analysis. For this reason this analysis is therefore systematic as well as concurrent.

Stories were also segmented and a statement was applied to each segment. These statements were then copied onto a large piece of paper and were categorised. All statements belonging to the same category were clustered. Memos and tables were written and created summarising characteristics as well as the sum and substance of these stories.

The multiplicity of data sources and the analytical procedures described above are noted in the literature as techniques of "triangulation" (Denzin, 1978), or "layering of information" (Pitman & Maxwell, 1992). These techniques have led to the discovery of regularities or themes, some particular to specific data, others linking in the form of patterns. These themes and patterns have informed the presentation of findings and the thesis argument.

### **Reliability and validity of findings and interpretations**

Research is usually considered credible, sound and trustworthy to the extent that criteria of reliability and validity are addressed in research design, data collection, analysis procedures and interpretation of findings. It must be stressed, however, that criteria of validity and reliability of qualitative research are the object of much argument and debate. Approaches, based in different philosophical and theoretical assumptions, range from seeking unitary meaning for reliability and validity analogous to those utilised for quantitative studies to the rejection of both conventional standards and common criteria for evaluating research (Denzin, 1978; Pelto & Pelto, 1978; Patton, 1990; Smith, 1990).

Qualitative research is highly dependent on the researcher as no investigator does research exactly like another one. For this reason, there is an imperative need to specify precisely what was done and how it was done in a study if any follow up studies are to take place. In addition, for the research to be trustworthy and useful, there is a need to demonstrate that findings and interpretations are authentic representations of some reality, and that findings and interpretations enable others to understand similar situations and further develop these understandings in follow-up studies.

The extent to which the study can be replicated is, therefore, defined as reliability while the extent to which findings are comparable and translatable is defined as validity. In order to deal with the reliability and validity considerations of this study, I have selected the approach and format presented in LeCompte and Preissle (1993) and Schumacher and McMillan (1993). Their approach has translated the tenets of internal and external reliability and validity conventionally used in positivistic traditions for their relevance to qualitative, ethnographic and phenomenological traditions. I have chosen this specific approach because it provides detailed, useful and necessary reliability and validity information when, as is the case for this study, a claim of replicability is made. The following sections outline the factors enhancing external and internal reliability and validity in the study.

#### **Factors enhancing external and internal reliability of findings and interpretations**

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) and Schumacher and McMillan (1993) indicate that ethnographers enhance the external and internal reliability of their data, that is the extent to which the study can be replicated, and the extent to which agreement on the

descriptions of events can be reached, by identifying and dealing with the following problems: researcher's status position, social contexts and conditions, data collection and analysis, analytical premises, verbatim accounts and member checking. The following explains how these aspects have been handled in the research.

### **Researcher's status position**

My role among participants was that of a researcher from the outside and as such I was clearly positioned outside the hierarchical and knowledge structures that framed participants' involvement in and understanding of Mauritian primary education. For these reasons, I did not bring any specific insight or perspective of and about Mauritian primary education into the research process. Moreover, as a researcher coming from Australia, I did not belong to any particular Mauritian cultural, ethnic or religious grouping which could have given me access to special knowledge from particular participants, or limit access to knowledge from other participants. For these reasons, I also did not bring any personal interest or emotional agendas into the research.

On the other hand, I have teaching experience in France, England, Australia and Papua New Guinea where I have lived and worked in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual settings. My teaching experience, exposure to diverse cultures and facility with languages have enabled me to enter the world of schools relatively easily and has enabled me to recognise and empathise with diversity as well as communicate directly with participants in their own language.

### **Participants' selection**

The criteria, rationale and processes used in selecting participants have been described fully in the corresponding sections of this chapter, so that researchers who hope to replicate the study may themselves select individuals who share similar characteristics. These sections clearly specify who research participants were and the rationale used for their selection (see Table 6). They also clearly delineate the extent and degrees of their participation in the research.

### **Social contexts and conditions**

Descriptions of participants, places and conditions where events and interviews took place have been described in great detail in the chapter *A day in the life of school*, as well as the rest of the report where appropriate, so that researchers who hope to replicate the study have clear directives to follow should they want their research to be undertaken in similar social situations and conditions.

The fact that interviews happen in one setting and not another may have some considerable effect on what is said or done as the following illustrates. I have noted for example that teachers were interviewed in the school setting and during their free periods. Findings related to teachers' opinion of Mauritian primary education may have been similar, slightly or even greatly different should teachers had been interviewed at home or had to stay in school at the end of their working day. I also noted the fact that I gave minimalist information to what drawings should include and stopped teachers from giving instructions to children while they drew. Findings related to pupils' representation of Mauritian primary education may have been similar, slightly different

or even greatly different had I given more detailed instruction or allowed teachers to give their own instructions.

### **Data collection and analysis techniques**

A thorough identification and description of data collection and analysis strategies and techniques is provided in this chapter. It includes detailed descriptions of how all sets of data were recorded and under what circumstances. It provides a retrospective step by step account of how all sets of data were analysed and synthesised and the line of argument for the presentation of findings was developed. These methodological steps have been reported clearly with the hope in mind that other researchers can use them as a guide by which to replicate the study in similar or dissimilar circumstances.

### **Analytical premises**

Chapter Three clearly identifies the assumptions and theoretical tenets delineating the research approach. It outlines the theoretical premises and defines the constructs which have informed and shaped the research so that other researchers hoping to replicate the research may start from similar premises.

### **Verbatim accounts**

The report incorporates verbatim accounts of observational notes and interview transcripts, which, according to Wolcott (1975), provide readers the means for accepting or rejecting the investigator's conclusions. It also incorporates raw data in the form of drawings which similarly provide reader means for accepting and rejecting the investigator's conclusions. Furthermore, the report provides the reader with multiple

examples in the presentation of any concepts and ideas and as such increases internal reliability .

### **Member and peer checking**

Some of my findings were corroborated through conversations with the three Mauritian educational professionals that I have involved in the analysis of drawings (see above). In addition, almost every day during field-work, I was able to discuss what I was learning and finding with two Mauritian friends, sometimes separately sometimes together. These two informants were both educational professionals familiar with educational research and very informed about Mauritian primary education. Although our discussions were informal, they allowed me, over time, to corroborate descriptions of events and interactions, interpretations of participants' meanings and general explanations of Mauritian primary education structures and processes. Similarly, this time on a weekly basis, I was able to discuss my findings and ideas with my field supervisor. As with previous conversations, these discussions have corroborated my observations and findings.

In addition, it is my intention to donate a copy of the research report to the Mauritius Institute of Education where it will be at the disposition of participants and other researchers. I also intend to publish the thesis in the form of a book thus providing wider opportunities for collegial evaluation of the research findings.

### **Factors enhancing external and internal validity of findings and interpretations**

Validity is the extent to which the findings and interpretations generated in the study match what occurs in reality. Internal validity asks whether researchers actually observe



and hear what they think they are observing and hearing. External validity asks whether the study can claim comparability and translatability. The following explains how problems relating to internal and external validity have been handled in the research.

### **Internal validity**

The claim of high internal validity of ethnographic study rests on its data collection and analysis methods (LeComte & Preissle, 1993; Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). Several factors increase the internal validity of this study. They are outlined in what follows.

- Lengthy data collection period. The fact that I lived among participants for four months gave me opportunities for continual data analysis, comparison and corroboration to refine ideas and constructs. This ensured a match between my categories and participant realities and corroborative data.
- Participants' language. The data generated from in-depth interviews is exclusively phrased in participants' language and thus reflects their categories. As explained earlier the three interviews/steps were very open and gave participants real opportunities to express themselves with their own words. Questions, when asked, were asked to get a deeper understanding of participants' meanings rather than present my ideas and concepts.
- Natural settings. All observations and most in-depth interviews were conducted during periods of fieldwork in the two schools where the realities of Mauritian primary education were reflected on a day to day basis.
- Reflexivity. The data collection and analyses phases were subjected to continuous questioning and revaluation. I have, for example, inserted memos alongside

observational notes during all phases of data collection. These memos have allowed me to keep track of my subjective as well as analytical comments.

### **External validity**

The study does not aim at generalisation of findings but aims at extending understanding by providing descriptions and interpretations that will enable others to understand similar situations and extend these understandings in further research.

LeComte and Preissle (1993) and Schumacher and McMillan (1993) assert that threats to the conventional external validity of ethnographic findings and interpretations are created by whatever hinders or lessens a study's comparability and translatability and limits its usefulness. For them, comparability is the extent to which units of analysis, concepts generated, participants' and sites' characteristics are sufficiently described so that other researchers may use the study and extend its findings to other studies addressing similar issues. Translatability on the other hand is the extent to which the researcher has utilised theoretical frameworks and research techniques that are understood by other researchers in similar fields. Comparability and translatability can be established by demonstrating what Wolcott (1973) calls the "typicality" of a phenomenon, that is the extent to which it can be compared along dimensions that are also relevant to similar events.

In many ways the constructs generated in the Mauritian context are 'typical' of that context and thus comparability applies to further research in a similar Mauritian context. To that end, the distinct characteristics of the two sites and of the participants have been clearly identified throughout the study. Table 7 indicates numbers of participants and

outlines types of participants in terms of their profession, occupation or classroom levels level. These characteristics are reiterated as specific examples and cases are chosen to illustrate the presentation of findings.

The transferability of the research, on the other hand, rests with the clear statements of its philosophical assumptions, the socio-cultural approach that informs its conceptual framework and the clear statement of the various aspects of its data collection and analysis designs. The research in that sense holds prospects for comparative studies.

## **Summary**

An ethnographic design was selected as appropriate for the research purpose and the specific focus on participants' actions. Data was collected in Mauritius, for the most part in two primary schools and was collected using multiple techniques.

Observations were utilised in order to document the physical characteristics of school settings; to describe the people who work and frequent these schools; to document routines, teaching and learning processes and the affects these processes have on pupils' experience of schooling. In-depth interviews were used in order to bring participants' constructs into the understanding of Mauritian primary education and document the issues and priorities participants bring to this understanding. The research also utilised stories and drawings created by children in order to elicit their own brand of understanding of Mauritian primary education.

The schools were selected purposely to reflect, not represent, the rich fabric of Mauritian society. They were middle in most aspects and there was nothing specifically

unique and extreme in terms of their size, the ethnic background of children, religious and socio-economic characteristics of their populations, availability of resources, teaching practices and performance at examinations. In order to “maximise variation” one school has been selected from the rural area and the other school from the urban area. Participants were also selected purposely. Criteria of “maximum variation” and “intensity” were applied to their selection. The rationale for their selection was to obtain a broad range of experiences and view-points, so as to document the realities of Mauritian primary education and obtain a multiple perspective of the understanding of Mauritian primary education. A combination of the experiences and view-points of school-based and outside school participants/stakeholders was thought necessary so as to provide the broadest base for achieving these aims and offer maximum variation. Participants were selected to contribute their daily/ professional/specific experiences and view-points. School-based participants included pupils, school teaching and non teaching staffs as well as parents. Outside school participants included individuals from primary education, related government and non-government organisations.

Data collection techniques included participant and direct observation in the two school settings, verbal communication in the form of informal conversations and in-depth three steps/interviews (51 interviews were conducted), the collecting of drawings of school and class (200 drawings were collected) and the collecting of stories written by children (31 stories were collected).

The intent of observation was to document school routines, activities, descriptions of settings and participants as well as to learn what questions lay behind participants’ actions and interactions. The intent of interviews was to document the understanding of

Mauritian primary education built upon the details of participants' lives and experiences. The intent of drawings and stories depicting a day at school or an imaginary dialogue between siblings was to document the dominant features of pupils' experience of Mauritian primary education and point to their understanding of that education in their lives.

Data analysis was emergent and inductive. Units of analysis evolved from data according to their meaning and unfolded during various stages of data analysis.

Concurrent analysis of observation and interview data consisted of recording insights and decisions in regards to the narrowing, the deepening and the focus of the research.

Research questions started to develop at that stage. Systematic analysis of all data on the other hand consisted of selecting, indexing, categorising, coding, comparing, synthesising and interpreting the several sources of data. These techniques led to the discovery of themes and patterns which have informed the presentation of findings and the line of argument utilised in the thesis.

Several factors enhanced the reliability and validity of findings and interpretations.

Reliability was enhanced by my status position of outsider, the accuracy of description of participants, of social contexts, data collection, analysis techniques, and analytical premises, as well as by the use of verbatim accounts and members and peer checking.

Validity, on the other hand, was enhanced by the use of participants' language and a continuous reflexivity habit. It was also enhanced by the fact that data was collected on the field for a lengthy period of time.

The experiences and understanding of primary education, as they are lived and expressed by the peoples in Four Hills and Terre Bleue, are at the core of this thesis. Their stories are part of a bigger story, the cultural narrative of the past, which forms the very base and is constitutive of contemporary experiencing and understanding of the present. The next chapter outlines the major patterns of that context.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE MAURITIAN CONTEXT**

This chapter is a selective account of Mauritian socio-cultural patterns as they have evolved over time and provides the historical and cultural context against which the understanding of contemporary Mauritian primary education will be discussed and interpreted. The chapter uses secondary material and is organised in two major sections. The first presents an overview of the circumstances, peoples and events which over Mauritius' rich and complex history have marked and characterised its societal development, while the second focuses more specifically upon the educational development and structures within that context.

#### **Mauritius societal context**

Under the slogan of "Unity in Diversity", Mauritius peacefully gained its independence from Britain in 1968. The country became a Republic within the Commonwealth in 1992 and has evolved into a plural society noteworthy for its extraordinary diversity in terms of ethnicity, religions and languages and for the peaceful cohabitation of people on such a small and densely populated island.

Spanning its 400 year history, Mauritius has served as a mercantilist relay with Port Louis as a major free sea-port in the eighteenth century, became "the number one sugar-producer in the British Empire" in the mid-nineteenth century (Chinapah, 1983) and experienced "deep economic crisis" from mid-nineteenth century to mid-twentieth

century (Bunwaree, 1994, p. 42). In the latter part of the twentieth century, Mauritius diversified its economy with the creation of an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) dubbed "the engine of economic growth in the 1980s" (Bunwaree, 1994, p. 49) and a tourist sector dubbed "one of the foremost luxury holiday destinations in the world" (UNICEF 1994, p. 6).

The history of Mauritius is the story of people who have arrived in consecutive waves since 1715. As there was no indigenous population on the island, all Mauritians can trace their ancestry to an immigrant past which has included French planters in the eighteenth century, African and Malagasy slaves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Indian indentured labourers in the nineteenth century and Chinese merchants in the early twentieth century. These diverse immigrants came bearing their cultures, religions and languages and have contributed to form the complex, cultural, socio-economic and political milieu of contemporary Mauritius. How this milieu came about and how Mauritians have adjusted to such diversity is at the core of this analysis of Mauritian society.

### **Mauritian society in the colonial era**

#### **The Dutch in Mauritius (1598-1710)**

The Portuguese explorer Fernandez Peirera discovered Mauritius in 1507. Its pre-independence history, however, begins in 1598 after its re-discovery by the Dutch admiral Wybrant van Warwijck who took possession of the island in the name of the Dutch and named it Mauritius in honour of Maurice van Nassau, Prince of Orange.



In the following century, the Dutch made two unsuccessful attempts to settle in the island, the first between 1638 and 1658 and the second between 1664 to 1710.

Historians associate the Dutch failure to colonise the island with shortage of food, difficulties encountered for establishing conditions able to support the population permanently and the absence of good leadership among the successive eighteen governors (Malim, 1952; Toussaint, 1977; Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993). By the time the Dutch abandoned Mauritius for their new settlement in Cape Town, they had introduced sugar from Java (Batavia), a crop which came to dominate the Mauritian economy well into the twentieth century. In a short period of time, the Dutch settlers had exterminated the island's flightless bird, the *dodo*, as its flesh became valuable food and denuded the island of its valuable ebony.

#### **The French East India company (1725-1767)**

In 1715, while stopping in Mauritius on his way to Bourbon (now Reunion), where the French East India Company had settled in 1665, and on confirming that the island was unoccupied, Captain Dufresne D'Arsel claimed Mauritius for the French East India Company under the name of Ile De France, the name which was to remain the island's name for almost a century. The settling of Ile de France, initially administered from Bourbon, started in 1720. The early French settlement of the island was composed of: "hodgepodge of whites, slaves, convicts and prostitutes" (Bowman, 1991) and it is also noted that "anarchy, disorder and corruption were rampant " (Toussaint, 1977, p. 29).

The destiny of the island changed under the governorship of Labourdonnais (1735-1746), who on arrival found "a population of 190 whites and 648 slaves (plus some

maroons) living in primitive mud -and- post huts at Port Louis" (Bowman 1991, p. 12). The permanence of French settlement on the island was still in doubt when he arrived in 1735. By 1746 when he left, the colony was firmly established.

Labourdonnais moved the French India Company headquarters from Bourbon to Ile de France, built a harbour and fortifications in Port Louis, the present capital city and main port of modern Mauritius, and soon transformed the colony into an important port of call on the spice trade route of the Indian Ocean. He established shipyards, built an aqueduct, a hospital, roads, warehouses, officers' and government quarters for the company, revived sugar cultivation, established the first sugar mill, and generally developed the town of Port Louis as a flourishing place (Toussaint, 1977; Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993; Bowman, 1991).

Settling of the island on a grander scale started at that time. French citizens were brought by the East India Company to invest their capital and apply their skills in the administration of the large plantations planned for the island. Slaves from Madagascar and the African continent were imported by the company to do the work in the developing plantation society as well as in the port. It is estimated that some 20,000 slaves were landed in Ile de France between 1735 and 1767 (Bowman, 1991). However, in spite of increased prosperity on the island, the fortunes of the French India Company became seriously affected by the Seven Years War (1746-1767) and the Company was forced to sell Ile de France to the French Crown for 12 million pounds in 1764 (Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993).

### Royal administration (1767-1810)

During royal administration, Port Louis became a major free sea-port for French activities in the Indian Ocean, and the island experienced significant economic growth as free trade drew the merchants ships of the world to Port Louis and as a plantation society was being established (Toussaint, 1978; Bowman, 1991). Increasing prosperity and the demand for cheap labour led to significant population growth. Table 8 shows that in 1767, at the beginning of French Colonial rule, the population of Ile de France was 18,777 and with the arrival of new French settlers, free coloured<sup>21</sup> and slaves by 1808, it increased to 77,768.

**TABLE 8: POPULATION GROUPS IN MAURITIUS 1767 &1808**

Years	White	Free Coloured	Slaves	Total
1767	3,163	587	15,027	18,777
1808	6,489	5,912	65,367	77,768

Source: Kuczynski (1949). *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*. Vol. 2 p. 758. London: Oxford University Press.

The conditions of life for people living on Ile de France under French Rule were marked by extremes of wealth and destitution. For the ruling French minority, Port Louis offered 'socialising and grand receptions' and a way of life resembling that of the "Breton nobility" (Bowman, 1991, p.15). In contrast, the following statement gives an idea of life as experienced by the slave population:

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<sup>21</sup> The free coloured population (*gens de couleur*), originally comprised of Indians recruited as free labourers, grew as slaves were freed and with the offspring of French settlers and slaves.

At day break, the smacking of a whip is the signal that calls them to their work; and they then proceed to the plantation, where they labour in a state of almost nakedness, and in the heat of the sun . . . For the least act of negligence, they are tied hand and foot to a ladder, when the overseer gives them a certain number of strokes on their back with a long whip; and with a three pointed collar clasped round their neck, they are brought back to work (C. Grant 1801 quoted in Bowman, 1991, p.16).

French Rule came to an end when Britain's strategic interest in the Indian Ocean region gained momentum and the island was captured on December, 3, 1810. Decaën, the last French governor, capitulated under generous terms. French troops were not treated as prisoners of war and the "laws, religion, language and customs of local settlers were safeguarded, Mauritius became formally British but remained French" (Bowman, 1991, p. 17).

### **The British colonial rule (1810-1968)**

The island was formally ceded in full right and sovereignty by France to England at the Treaty of Paris in 1814 regaining its Dutch name Mauritius. The line of authority formally ran from the British government through the Colonial Office to the Governor in Mauritius. Although Mauritians accepted formal British control, "the British presence was often little more than a formality . . . that rested atop a rigidly stratified society dominated by the Franco Mauritian elite" (Bowman, 1991, p. 27). The French oligarchy was initially left unchallenged by the British in order to preserve their economic interest. Over time and in spite of 160 years of British Rule, the French retained a strong social and cultural influence in Mauritius especially in terms of language and religion which has remained to date and this for two main reasons: First, because the British never settled the island in any significant numbers and second, as noted by Chinapah (1883), because the French, through their assimilation policy were more successful at

assimilating free coloured and slaves into main-stream French culture, than the British whose colonial practice is described as "divide and rule" (p.12).

The history of Mauritius under British Rule has been marked by the abolition of slavery, the arrival of indentured labourers from India and the transformation of Mauritius into a sugar colony. The following shows how these interrelated developments have had a significant economic, demographic and cultural impact on the island and in time marked the beginning of the transition of power between the well entrenched Franco Mauritian oligarchy to an Indo-Mauritian majority.

Slave trade was abolished by the British Parliament in 1807. Under pressure exercised by the plantocracy and a compliant first British governor, Sir Robert Farquhar, it took Mauritius 28 years to comply with this law. To make the abolition of slavery more acceptable, slave owners were paid 2,100,000 pounds by the British government for freeing some 66,000 slaves. However, in order to force them to remain on the estate plantations, former slaves were 'obligated' to a six year apprenticeship with their former masters. Following desertions, the apprenticeship system was abolished in 1839, two years short of its six years term. Former slaves had resettled in the coastal fishing villages and towns where they "resisted wage labour ... and any forms of organised work" (Bowman, 1991, p. 18).

The expansion of sugar as the main export crop followed the decision made by the British government in 1825 to allow import of sugar from Mauritius at the same rate of duty as that from the West Indies (Addison et al., 1993, p. 50). The Franco-Mauritian - owned estates were soon transformed into sugar plantations. Cultivation grew from

10,221 to 50,998 arpents<sup>22</sup> between 1806 and 1830 (Bowman, 1991, p. 19) while production in 1826 (21,244 tons) was nearly double that of 1825 (10,869 tons) (Addison et. al., 1993, p. 50).

The expanding sugar economy combined with the abolition of slavery led to demands for new sources of cheap labour and the import of Indian indentured labourers who, it is noted, came from "economically downtrodden areas of India . . . lured by promises that were never kept" (Bowman, 1991, p.21). Tinker (1974) argues that indentured labour became a new system of slavery,

... an uneasy balance had been evolved between the Indian government, Whitehall and the various importing colonies in which lip service was paid to the interests of the Indian coolie while plantation industry was enabled to draw upon a pool of cheap labour with a minimum of restrictions and a maximum of leverage against its workers (p. 115).

451,796 Indians were brought to Mauritius as indentured labourers between the years of 1835 and 1910. In that same period, 157, 539 (including children born in Mauritius) returned to India (Kuczynski, 1949, p.796).

The conditions of indentured labour in Mauritius were oppressive and reminiscent of those experienced earlier by the slaves. Labourers earned about "ten shillings a month" while by comparison the wages of a labourer in England varied between "three and four shillings a day" (Addison & Hazareesingh, 1993, p. 56). In addition, Indian labourers were subjected to a system of "double cut whereby absence of work for one day meant the loss of two days" pay and they were expected to work a six day week and to do unpaid work on Sunday (*la corvée*) (Tinker, 1974, p. 188). Their free movement within

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<sup>22</sup> An arpent is an old French unit of measurement equalling 0.4 hectare.

the island was restricted, as the Labour Law of 1867 made it compulsory to carry passes. Without passes, labourers were subject to arrest and punishment under vagrancy laws (Bowman, 1991, p. 22). Until the indenture system came to a formal end in 1917, Indian indentured labourers were overworked and ill-treated. Their work was relentless and heavy.

There was a decline in the fortunes of the sugar industry in the 1860s, due to a world - wide increase in sugar production and the isolation of Mauritius following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Bowman, 1991, p. 23-25). This slump in the sugar industry led the local plantocracy to stop the recruitment of labour. Between 1870 to 1920, this group, the Franco-Mauritians sold small holdings of the less profitable parts of plantations to Indo-Mauritians who, through concessions granted to them by estates, such as the loaning of land for market gardening, odd jobs and employment of their wives and children, had managed to accumulate small amounts of capital (Benedict, 1958). Following this parcelling out of land known as the "*grand morcellement*", Allen (1988) calculates that by 1921, 93 percent of the island's planters were Indians and they owned 35 percent of land under cultivation which for the most part, was sugar cane (pp. 182-184).

The "*grand morcellement*" did not provide a solution to economic stagnation and Mauritius remained until the 1970s, an economically underdeveloped country depending on one export crop sugar. It, however, gave the Indian population opportunities to gain "a toehold in the island's economy" and also "set the stage for Indian demands for access to the political process and the eventual granting of that access" (Bowman, 1991, p. 25).

The Indian proportion of the Mauritian population rose from 18% in 1851 (Kuczynski, 1949, p. 796), to approximately 71%. Table 9 summarises the evolution and breakdown of Mauritian population from 1846 to 1952.

**TABLE 9: POPULATION GROUPS IN MAURITIUS 1846-1952**

Census Date	General Population	Indo-Mauritians	Chinese	Total
1846	102,217	56,245		158,462
1881	107,323	248,993	3,558	356,316
1901	108,422	259,086	3,515	371,023
1921	104,216	265,524	6,745	376,485
1944	143,056	265,524	10,882	419,185
1952	148,238	335,327	17,850	501,415

Source: *Annual Digest of Statistics* 1985 (Port Louis: Central Statistical Office, p. 3).

Table 9 shows that the Mauritian population is officially organised in three distinct groups, the general population, the Indo-Mauritians and the Chinese. These three categories are further organised according to linguistic and religious divisions. The general population group includes Creoles<sup>23</sup> of African or mixed African and European descent, as well as the Europeans for the most part French or of French descent. They speak Creole, French and English. The Indo-Mauritian group includes Hindus and Muslims who speak their ancestral languages (Hindi, Bhojpuri, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu and Arabic) as well as some Creole. The Chinese group, arriving in the early 1880s incorporates Christians and non-Christians, whose ancestral language is

<sup>23</sup> "Creole conventionally refers to Christians who do not claim European and Asian ancestry, Blacks (of largely African ancestry), Coloured (of mixed origins), Chinese Creoles and Christians of Tamil descent whose families converted and changed their names several generations ago. In other words the term Creole inevitably denotes a *residual category*, whose members have language and religion in common but who do not usually perceive themselves as a group" (Eriksen, 1988, p. 109).



Haka. The economic and occupational divisions found within these groupings are described by Benedict (1958):

The British held the top positions in government, the Franco-Mauritians owned and managed the sugar estates, the top stratum of Creoles held white collar jobs in the government, commerce and on estates, the middle stratum with artisans' jobs on and off estates, and the lowest stratum with fishing; the Chinese with general retail trade; the Gujarati Indians (mostly Muslims) with the importation of grain and cloth; and the vast body of Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, with labour on sugar estates and small holdings. . . . In 1956, the sugar industry employed an average of some 55,000 workers, government departments over 10,000 . . . The next largest employers, all chiefly manual labour industries, employed some 6,000 workers (pp. 316-319).

A minority of sugar field labourers were employed monthly and lived on the estate. The rest, including small holders, were engaged by the day and for low wages by the estate and according to season. Their labour in the sugar fields is described as being an un-attractive proposition physically, economically as well as socially, while the obtaining of a government job (despite the fact that it is reaching saturation point) is said to be perceived by 'young Indians' as *the* way out of the fields (Benedict, 1958, p. 317-320).

Political power, as with the best jobs, was in the hands of a few. From the 1880s to the 1930s, politics in Mauritius was dominated by the Franco-Mauritians and a very small group of well-off conservative Creole allies. It is not until the 1930s-1940s that political strife emerged between the dominant minority of Franco Mauritians and the oppressed majority, the descendants of slaves, of free coloured and of indentured Indian labourers (Chinapah, 1983, p.11; Addisson & Hazareesingh, 1993, p. 83). It is at that period that several trade unions and the Labour Party, with for the first time Indians in prominent positions emerged and organised Creoles and Indians into pressing their economic and

political demands. Two labour strikes the first in 1937 and the second in 1943, brought constitutional reform in 1947 in which the right to vote was extended to anyone able to read and write simple sentences in any of the languages used in Mauritius.

These reforms brought unprecedented changes in the political processes and overhauled the political picture of Mauritius. The following 1948 elections were fought along party lines and for the first time in the history of Mauritius, gave Mauritian people a representative government. These elections and the consequent 1953, 1959, 1963 and 1967 elections were won by the Labour Party under the leadership of Seewoosagur Ramgoolam who in time became to be known as the father of independence. The 1948 elections marked the beginning of majority rule, the Hindu representatives secured 11 of the 19 elected seats, the Creoles secured seven seats and the Franco Mauritians just one seat (Bunwaree, 1994, p.18; Addisson & Hazareesingh, 1993, p. 91; Chinapah, 1983, p.10; Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 116).

The transition of power from the Franco-Mauritians and their Creole allies to the Indo-Mauritian community took place within an atmosphere of intense communal rivalry and little violence (Bowman, 1991). In the decade before independence, Mauritian minorities were fearful of being disadvantaged by a government dominated by Hindus. It is at that time that a significant numbers of Franco-Mauritians and middle-class Creoles fearing that they and their children's economic privileges would not be sustained in an Indian led government, emigrated to Australia, Britain and France

Mauritius gained independence from Britain following the 1967 elections once again won by Ramgoolam and the Labour Party. Sir Ramgoolam, who had been chief minister

of Mauritius since 1961, is described as having shown “enormous capacity for negotiation and reconciliation with all other groups in the population” and as commanding popular support in the years preceding independence (Bowman, 1991, p. 41). His return into power is said to have convinced the British that Mauritius was ready for independence. Independence came on the 12th of March 1968 and Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam became Mauritius’ first Prime Minister.

### **Mauritian society in the post independence era**

Since independence, Mauritius has retained the multiparty system that evolved during the last years of colonialism. Its political system is organised on the British model with a Prime Minister chosen by the party with majority in Parliament. Mauritian politics have, just as they were before independence, continued to be marked by “coalitions being made and unmade and political activists shifting party allegiances” (Bowman, 1991, p. 68). Political processes, in spite of religious, ethnic and linguistic differences, have remained fully democratic in Mauritius. Since independence, Mauritius has also managed to rise from an impoverished underdeveloped sugar colony to a middle income country. The socio-economic and political events of post independent Mauritius are discussed chronologically around the terms served by Mauritius’ two prime ministers S. Ramgoolam (1968-1982) and A. Jugnauth (1982-1995).

### **The Ramgoolam period: 1968-1982**

Following its victory in 1967, the Labour Party, under the leadership of Ramgoolam and with the help of coalition partners, went on to win the 1976 elections and retained power until 1982.

Several key economic concerns confronted the Mauritian leaders at independence. The country had a sharply rising population (501,415 at the 1952 census to 826, 199 at the 1972 census), a narrow sugar-based economy and widespread unemployment (10% in 1968 and 15% in 1982). This bleak picture was exacerbated by two factors. First in the 1970s, 8,000 to 10,000 young people each year were completing school and joining the job market. Second, most jobs required unskilled labour and were poorly paid. Many workers, especially in the sugar sector, were employed only seasonally (Bowman, 1991, p. 114).

Mauritius' economic future, however, took a new turn in the 1970s and this for two reasons. First, a policy paper set the country's economic development agenda for the decade 1971-1980 (National Development Plans were then to follow on a regular basis). Among other things this first plan called for the elimination of unemployment and the creation of 13,000 new jobs. Second and in order to fulfil its plan, the government passed an act for the creation of the Mauritius Export Processing Zone (EPZ) which began functioning in 1971. The establishment of planning processes (specific development plans followed) and of textile manufacturing in the EPZ have guided and marked Mauritian economic development ever since.

Between 1971 and 1977, 64,000 jobs were created, an excess of 51,000 over the 13,000 planned by the government (See Table 10). The growth of the manufacturing sector was complemented by exceptional sugar crops coinciding with a short lived boom in sugar prices and by the success Mauritius had in generating international development assistance from Britain, France, USA, India, China and Arab countries. Bowman (1991)

attributes the ability to attract financial assistance from such a wide source of donors to Mauritius' multilingual and multicultural heritages.

Sparked by the world recession and the end of the sugar boom, the country's economy was again in crisis in the late 1970s. Foreign exchange reserves which stood at \$183 million in 1975 fell to \$14 million in 1979, enough to cover just two weeks of import (Africa Contemporary Record, 1979-1980, p. 12). After 1976, job creations stalled, school leavers were entering the job market with little prospects for finding employment. By the late 1970s, 75,000 people (approximately 21 % of the labour force) were unemployed, inflation was running at 30% or more per year while the country's foreign debt climbed over 5 billion rupees (World Development Report, 1997 p. 274).

The following table highlights the employment trends in Mauritius by sectors between 1971 and 1982, the employment growth experienced in Mauritius between 1971 to 1977 and its stagnation between 1977 and 1982.

**TABLE 10: EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN MAURITIUS 1970-1982**

Year	Agriculture	EPZ	Hotels & Restaurants	Public sector	All sectors	Change
1971	59,750	644	1,153	47,826	142,485	+12,236
1972	61,924	2,588	1,559	44,288	148,179	+5,694
1973	62,063	5,800	2,215	44,161	157,787	+9,608
1974	63,049	8,970	2,298	43,890	167,218	+9,431
1975	64,469	10,267	2,434	44,730	172,814	+5,596
1976	64,182	17,163	3,120	46,169	184,539	+11,725
1977	65,297	18,169	3,050	47,398	194,762	+10,223
1978	60,767	17,740	3,174	49,483	198,740	+3,978
1979	59,368	20,421	3,343	53,071	199,438	+698
1980	58,042	22,002	3,109	54,546	197,561	-1,877
1981	56,955	23,601	3,271	54,905	196,314	-1,247
1982	56,711	23,476	3,179	55,048	195,078	-1,236

Source: A. Jeetun, 'Employment trends and training needs' in *PROSI* (May 1989) p. 18.

In order to redress the economy, help was sought from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1979 which offered balance of payments support in exchange for the Mauritian government acceptance of an austerity package.

It is in the midst of these economic difficulties that the Ramgoolam era came to an end at the elections of 1982. By that time, the Labour party had become plagued by concerns over its ageing leadership, weakened by infighting for succession and was also accused of government corruption and nepotism (Bowman, 1991). The Labour Party, which had dominated Mauritian politics since 1948 and had won the 1967 and 1976 elections, won no seats at the 1982 elections. In its place the coalition between Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) and the newly formed Parti Socialiste Mauricien PSM<sup>24</sup> came to power under the leadership of Anerood Jugnauth. The coalition recorded an unprecedented victory by winning all 60 seats from the 20 constituencies in the country and 63.04 % of the vote (Chinapah, 1983, p.11).

### **The Jugnauth period (1983-1995)**

Anerood Jugnauth replaced Sir Ramgoolam and became Mauritius' second Prime Minister. Returned in power during the 1987 and 1991 elections, Jugnauth's tenure in office, propped up by many alliances, lasted until 1995 and was marked by an unprecedented economic boom for Mauritius and its people.

Following difficult beginnings, with high inflation rates and a very bleak unemployment situation, the economy eventually took off to the extent that the government and the popular press have commonly compared Mauritius economic expansion of the 1980s to

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<sup>24</sup> This party was formed by a group of Labour Party members opposed to its corruption (Bunwarce, 1994, p. 26).

that of the “four tigers” of East Asia (Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong). In the space of three years, from 1983 to 1986, the country’s annual economic growth expanded from 0.4% to 8.9% (Mauritius Country Report, 1988).

Mauritius’ exceptional economic boom of the 1980s is largely due to the sustained commitment of the Mauritian government to the IMF structural adjustment programme which was in place till the end of the 1980s. As a result of this commitment, two \$40 million loans had been completely repaid by 1988 (Mauritius Country Report, 1988, p. 25). It is also largely due to the continuing growth of the EPZ<sup>25</sup> as well as “favourable international conditions that held oil prices down, kept foreign tourists coming and sustained demand for Mauritian sugar and manufactured goods” (Bowman, 1991, p. 122). By the late 1980s, manufacturing in the EPZ, had supplanted the sugar sector in the Mauritian economy and represented approximately 60.0% of Mauritian total export (Mauritius Country Report, 1988) while its creation and expansion had put an end to the problems of employment that had beset the country since the 1950s (Bowman 1991; Bunwaree 1994). Table 11 shows that by 1988 manufacturing in the EPZ had supplanted the sugar industry and government sectors combined to become the country’s top employer.

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<sup>25</sup> The Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Mauritius is not located in a specific location. Factories have mushroomed all over the island.

**TABLE 11: EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN MAURITIUS 1982-1994**

Year	Agriculture	EPZ	Hotels & Restaurants	Public sector
1982	56,711	23,476	3,179	55,048
1988	49,599	90,738	4,983	54,650
1994	41,614	81,706	8,120 (1993)*	57,076

Source for 1982 & 1988 employment figures: A. Jectun, 'Employment trends and training needs' in *PROSI* (May 1989), p. 18.

Source for 1994 employment figures, *White Paper on Women* (1995).

\*Source for 1993 hotels and restaurants employment figures: UNICEF (1994) p. 6.

The impressive economic boom marked by rapid and exceptional growth was for the most part characterised by 'labour-intensive', 'low-skill' and 'low-tech' manufacturing (Bowman, 1991; Bunwaree, 1994). The situation has begun to change as foreign investors are starting to relocate in places such as Madagascar where cheaper labour can be found and are also beginning to replace cheap unskilled labour with more sophisticated techniques and machines (Bunwaree, 1996a). Table 11 shows a job shortfall of some 9,000 for the year 1994 in the EPZ that clearly illustrates this trend. Unemployment figures which up to 1994 ranged between 0 to 2%, went up to 4.5% in 1994, 5.2% in 1995 and 5.5% in 1996 (Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, 1997c, p. 9).

On the political front, in the mid-1990s there was a change in the country's leadership. The Jugnauth era came to an end at the elections of December 1995. These elections and the fall of the Jugnauth's government have been brought about by extraordinary developments linked to education and more specifically the proposed inclusion of Oriental Languages for ranking purposes in the very competitive CPE examination taken by pupils at the end of the primary education cycle (Dulloo Report, 1993). The



recommendations of the Dulloo Report for the inclusion of Oriental Languages, supposed to be implemented for the November 1995 CPE examination, sparked controversy in the country and developments that led to the fall of the Jugnauth's government. These developments are explained later on in this chapter.

New elections were held in December 1995 and won by a Labour Party and MMM alliance. Following these elections, Ramgoolam was once more the name of the Mauritian Prime Minister as Dr Navin Ramgoolam, the son of Sir Ramgoolam, replaced Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

### **Mauritian society in the late 1990s**

#### **Population profile and trends**

In 1995, the total population of Mauritius was estimated to be 1,1 million (Week-End 15/12/97 p.17). A density estimated for the year 1992 to be 549 per square kilometre (UNDP, 1994) makes Mauritius one of the most densely populated nations in the world. The crowded effect of the island is further aggravated by the fact that the nation's landmass is for the most part covered by sugar cane fields and some mountain ranges. As a result, approximately 41% of the population live in the urban areas concentrated in the districts of Plaine Wilhems and Port Louis and the rural district of Flaq. For the same reasons, the rural dwellers live in small towns rather than villages.

During the 1950s and 1960s, mirroring trends in the rest of the developing world, Mauritius' population recorded a growth of between two and three per cent per annum, leading social analysts to predict a population of three million by the end of the century

(Meade, 1968, p.3) and family planning associations to produce billboards showing people falling off the island (Etherington & Dodds, 1975). The joint efforts of the Mauritius Family Planning Association (MFPA) and Action Familiale have resulted in the fall of fertility rates and sharp decline in the rate of population increase. The average population growth rate was estimated to be 1.3 between 1990 and 1995 (World Development Report, 1997). In 1990, Mauritius received the UNPFA Population Award in recognition of its success in the area of population control.

### **Socio-economic and political trends**

Since independence, Mauritius has diversified its economy from a monocrop to a manufacturing sector in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) and a tourist sector. (Figure 2 in Appendix C shows the employment by industry in Mauritius in 1995).

In the late 1990s, the country embarked on a new economic phase, with an emphasis on communication and financial services comprising an emerging stockmarket, offshore banking and once again trade, in the free port of Port Louis (UNICEF, 1994, p.7). The country's new economic focus, will require new levels of adaptiveness, skills and qualifications from its workforce if the country is to make the shift from the "knitting island"<sup>26</sup> to the "intelligent /network island" comparable to Singapore (Bunwaree, 1996b).

The rapid growth of the Mauritian economy<sup>27</sup> led to significant improvements in the standard of living of most Mauritians. For example, taking into account increases in the cost of living, it is calculated that the net purchasing power of Mauritians has increased

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<sup>26</sup> Most of the factories in the EPZ are garment and especially knitted garment factories.

<sup>27</sup> Annual growth rate is estimated at 5.6% for 1995, 5.8% for 1996 and 5% for 1997 (MEPD, 1997).

by 25% between the mid 1980s to the early 1990s (UNICEF, 1994, p.59). As a result, most people have a job, food and clothing and most houses have a radio, television, a video cassette player and a refrigerator. Education and health services are free and the entire country is supplied with electricity, pipe borne water and is served by a good system of tarred roads and public transport.

If the rapid growth of the economy has translated into a visible improved standard of living for some Mauritians, difficulties remain for the average family. Two Mauritians out of three earn less than Rs 4000 per month (approximately AS 270) (Week-End 15/12/97 p.17) and a job for husband and wife has become a necessity in most households in order to support the modern needs of the family<sup>28</sup>. The 1990 census for example, shows that about half of all women<sup>29</sup> of reproductive age are salaried as employees. The changing role of women in Mauritian society has increased their economic and social status but is also reported as having brought social repercussions such as neglect of children and deteriorating food habits to name a few, in its wake (UNICEF Report, 1994; Heeralall & Lau Thi Keng, 1994).

The economic and social roles of Mauritian people in the mid-50s described earlier by Benedict (1958) have undergone significant changes in contemporary Mauritius.

Benedict (1958) described people delineated as belonging to the General Population as dominating the elite economic and government positions; the Sino-Mauritians as dominating commerce; the Hindo-Mauritians as labouring in the sugar plantations and the black and Creole population as the working and fishing classes.

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<sup>28</sup> Average daily earnings for a person employed in sugar cane fields is calculated at 142 rupees, in manufacturing at 137 rupees, hotel industry 152 rupees, government 115 rupees (between 7 and 10 AS)  
<sup>29</sup> In 1994, women represented over 70 % of the workforce in the EPZ (calculated from: White Paper on Women, 1995).

In contemporary Mauritius, while the Franco-Mauritians still hold the dominant positions in the sugar industry, these have now been opened to members of other communities. The Hindo-Mauritian community and more particularly the Hindus have transferred their newly found political power into occupying dominant roles in government and public service, to the disadvantage of the General Population which has had to take subordinate positions or emigrate (Moutou, 1996). Muslims and the more highly educated members of the General Population tend to be prominent in the private sector and the professions (Bowman, 1991). The Sino-Mauritians on the whole, are still associated with small trade, while the black population remains unchanged as the island working class and poor socio-economic community.

Since the advent of majority rule, with about thirty years of independence and through six democratically elected governments, the country has retained its political culture marked by incessant fragmentations and reassembling of parties and coalitions (the Labour Party and the MMM alliance split in June 1996) and has proved its ability to sustain a thriving multiparty democracy. The political stability of contemporary Mauritius is in large part due to its economic development which provided work and hope in the future to increasing numbers of young people. It is also believed to be due to the fact that in a "small village of one million people", extremes of corruption and nepotism, despite the fact that they do exist (Bowman, 1991; Bunter, 1994), have been, and continue to be, closely monitored and somewhat limited by intense public and press scrutiny.

## **Cultural trends**

In the Mauritian society, which the Mauritian writer Monique Dinan (1986) aptly qualifies as kaleidoscopic, religious and ethnic trends have remained stable since the mid 1930s. Approximately 51% of Mauritians are Hindus, 16 % Muslims and 32 % Christians most of them Catholics. Approximately 28% of Mauritians are classified as General Population, 67% Hindo-Mauritians (16% Muslim) and close to 3% Sino Mauritians and, as discussed earlier, covert nepotism and communal privilege have marked the political and work life of these diverse groups. An important factor limiting communal identification in Mauritius is that, unlike other countries (ie. Northern Ireland or Lebanon), housing is not segregated along ethnic lines. Mauritians live side by side and intermingle in shops, buses, towns and villages and experience similar living circumstances.

Given the diversity of ancestral origins of the Mauritian people, it is not surprising that language diversity remains an enduring facet of the Mauritian kaleidoscope and that their varied usage, as Eriksen (1990) puts it, is "... strongly reminiscent of the Tower of Babel" (p. 4). Mauritians grant purpose and status to their use of language. Almost all Mauritians speak several languages. They may for example speak a language at home and use several other languages in formal occasions and yet another one for writing. Table 12, based on data from the 1983 census, indicates the types and percentage breakdown of languages spoken at home by Mauritians.

TABLE 12: TYPES OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY MAURITIANS AT HOME IN 1983

Languages spoken At home	As % of total population (1983 census)
Creole	53.98
French	3.72
English	0.20
Hindi	11.49
Bhojpuri	20.38
Tamil	3.68
Telegu	1.58
Marathi	1.28
Gujarati	0.05
Urdu & Arabic	2.62
Chinese	0.63
Other languages	0.01
Not mentioned	0.27
Other Oriental languages	0.01
Other European languages	0.01

Source: Calculated from table: *Population by language actually spoken in 1983 with reference to language of forefathers*, in Dinan, 1986, p.30.

Creole, clearly emerges as the dominant language spoken in Mauritian homes. It is followed by Bhojpuri spoken by 20.38% and Hindi spoken by 11.49% of the population. These are followed by French spoken by 3.72% followed closely by Tamil 3.68%. Urdu and Arabic, spoken by the Muslim population are actually spoken by 2.62% of them at home. The other oriental languages are spoken by smaller proportions of Mauritians. In order of importance they are Telegu, Marathi, Chinese and Gujarati. English, the official language of Mauritius is spoken by only 0.2% at home<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Bunwarec (1994) notes that to date, "there is no clear explanation indicating the official language of the country. Section 49 of the constitution entitled 'official language' seems to indicate that the official language of Parliament is synonymous to the official language of the country and at the same time gives semi-official status to French : 'The official language of the Assembly should be English but any member may address the chair in French' p.110). Section 33 of the Constitution on the other hand specifies that "a person has to be able to" speak and read the English language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable him [sic] to take an active part in the proceedings of the assembly" (ibid, p.110).

Outside home, Creole is used as a first or additional language by virtually everyone in Mauritius and has emerged as the country's lingua-franca. This language has its roots in eighteenth century slavery where it evolved as the language of communication between the slaves and their masters and among the slaves themselves as they came from diverse places. In spite of its widespread usage and potential to culturally bind Mauritians (Virahsawmy, 1982), Creole never became Mauritius' national language. The language lacks standardised orthography and, because of its association with slavery, is generally perceived as low status. The efforts of Mauritians dedicated to promoting Creole as a national language have, over the years, been strongly resisted by most Mauritians for whom Creole is a language that lacks the sophistication and international exposure of English and French (Bowman, 1991, p. 55).

For Mauritians, Creole remains the language spoken informally at home with family, neighbours, people in the markets and shops or with colleagues at work, the language of "egalitarianism", while English and French have over time become associated with "knowledge" and "culture", while other languages are largely identified with what may be termed "ancestral heritage" . . . It is in French and English that the Mauritian usually reads and writes" (Baker, 1972, p. 35).

In Mauritius, where the dominant Western influence is French, usage of and proficiency in the English language is associated with having attained a certain level of education and is honoured as a neutral international language. English remains the language of an intellectual elite (Bowman, 1991). English is spoken and taught in schools and is extensively used for academic writing but much more rarely for literary writing. It is a necessity for written communication in administrative jobs and, as mentioned earlier, a

necessity to become a member of the Mauritian Legislative Assembly.

French language in Mauritius is, on the other hand, associated with a 'cultured' culture as well as popular culture. Bowman notes, for example, that in all, French/ Mauritian literature includes over 225 authors and 700 works over the past two centuries (Bowman, 1991, p. 59). French language is spoken and taught in schools; dominates television and radio broadcasts as well as the press. Because of these influences especially from radio and television, and due to the fact that Creole is heavily related to French, most Mauritians understand and speak some French.

Oriental languages are associated with ancestral heritage and are used in religious ceremonies and cultural festivals and feature in the popular Indian films played on national television or borrowed from video shops. There is also a significant Mauritian published literature in various Oriental languages especially in Hindi. Oriental languages are also taught in schools.

The first part of this chapter presented an overview of the circumstances, peoples and events which, over Mauritius rich and complex history, have marked and characterised its societal development. It has shown the diversity and complexity of Mauritian societal fabric, a "microcosm of the world's great cultures" (Dinan, 1986, p.1) and the country's incomparable ability to transform itself from an impoverished underdeveloped sugar colony into an independent society with a new economy based on modern industry and moving towards high tech industry. Diversity has not always been celebrated on the island. However, despite an enduring communal vision in many societal aspects one in which, as the popular Creole proverb says "*Sak zako bizin protez*



*so montayn*" (Each monkey must protect his mountain) (Eriksen, 1988, p.180), contemporary Mauritians live side by side in harmony.

Having brushed a canvas of Mauritian societal context, I now focus more specifically on the events and circumstances which have marked the history and organisation of Mauritian education within that context.

## **The history and organisation of Mauritian education**

### **The development of Mauritian education**

The development of Mauritian education is marked by specific events and circumstances which help to explain the priorities, beliefs and practices within the present primary education system. The following discussion of the growth of Mauritian education, from its colonial time to the present day, includes an understanding of the official discourse as well as a detailed presentation of how the contemporary Mauritian primary education system is organised.

The French colonial administration never introduced the equivalent of the primary and vocational schools which existed in France at the time. Prithipaul (1976) remarks that:

The system of social stratification that prevailed in the colony at the time of the company rule favoured the people who owned lands and had the privilege of belonging to the higher social ranks that were in ascendancy in France at the time ... classes of citizens who were usually described as the *Grands Blancs* in the colonies. Their lifestyles were characterised by extensive lands surrounding their residences and virtual isolation from the rest of the colonial life. As an elite belonging to the highest economic class they failed to champion the cause of schools or any social service in the colony during this time (cited in Ramdoyal, 1977, p.18).

Their children were sent to France for schooling. It is not until 1797 that the first school, called *College National*, was set up as a national educational institution on the island. *College National* catered exclusively for the needs of the island French elite for whom sending their children to France in order to be educated had become difficult because of the French revolution (Duvivier, 1891). The college, later called *Lycée*, was renamed Royal College by the British administration in 1813 and continues to play an important role in contemporary education.

The welfare of the slave and non-white population was not the initial interest of the first British governors who adopted a policy of *laissez-faire* and were busy "courting the loyalty and cooperation of the French population through conciliatory policies" (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 36). Upon their arrival, the attitude of neglect towards the education of the slaves that prevailed during the French colonial rule, was as will be shown later perpetuated by the Church of England.

The champion of education for the masses in early nineteenth century Mauritius was Reverend Lebrun from the London Missionary Society. This clergyman was initially sent to Mauritius in order to prepare grander missionary schemes for the neighbouring and populous island of Madagascar, but, upon arrival, as Ramdoyal (1977) notes:

Lebrun was appalled at the moral corruption and the loose living that characterised the colonial society of the day. He saw in education a leaven that would bring about a greater measure of equality, restraining on the one hand, the master sense of omnipotence and, on the other hand, the coloured community's feeling of helplessness and subservience (p. 37).

Lebrun remained in Mauritius and in 1815 opened free schools for the non-white population in spite of the hostility that his belief in education as a foundation of equality provoked among the colour-prejudiced French elite. His pioneering work made Lebrun the initiator of free education for all in Mauritius (Ramdoyal, 1977, pp. 37-45). These modest beginnings of education for the slaves/apprentices and for the coloured communities were recorded by Lebrun himself in *A Statement of the Moral and Religious Condition of the Free and Slave Population (1835)* (See Table 13 in Appendix D). In his statement, Lebrun indicated that, for a population of nearly 100,000 apprentices and free coloured on the island, there were seven places of worship (Catholic and Protestant), with a total attendance of 2,650. There were only four free Protestant schools attended by 298 people who, for the majority, were free coloured. The only school for slaves was run by Lebrun himself for 40 slaves.

By the early nineteenth century, substantial numbers of people in the coloured population were growing into a strong middle class and were occupying important but subordinate white collar jobs in government and the legal offices (Bowman, 1991). Apart from the Royal College<sup>31</sup>, from which they were excluded because of the colour bar (in place on the island until 1829), there was no provision for the secondary education of the children of these upward moving people. Their complaints, in which they were supported by Lebrun, led the British Colonial Government to declare the Royal College open to all citizens irrespective of race, colour or class. Amidst protest from the white population, in 1832 the Royal College admitted coloured boys for the first time (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 42).

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<sup>31</sup> *Royal College* was sending some of its students to the *Sorbone* for training in Medicine and Law (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 30).

The opening of Royal College to the 'coloured' population is described as: " the thin wedge which eventually led to the overthrow of the colonial structure supported by the twin pillars of poverty and ignorance [and marks the fact that] integration and not segregation was to be the ideal of Mauritian education in spite of forces to the contrary" (Ramdoyal, 1977 p.45).

In nineteenth century Mauritius, as in other colonies throughout the British Empire at that time, the education of the non-white population was for the most part in the hands of the Church and its missions. From 1836, schools could be legally opened in Mauritius "without the previous license and sanction of the Governor" (Mauritius Government Gazette, Ordinance No 52 of 1836). This new law led to significant improvements in terms of educational provision. Ramdoyal (1977) notes, for example, that by 1843 there were seven government schools and twenty two diverse missionary schools in the island (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 67).

The development of education in Mauritius was further complicated by the dual and often conflicting interests of the Franco-Mauritians and those of a politically determined British government. As mentioned earlier, and with the assistance of British missionaries and more particularly Lebrun, the British government had started the primary education of 'free coloured' and 'slave people' and had opened the doors of Royal College to 'coloured' boys, at least to those who could afford it. The Catholic Church on the other hand, as was traditional for that church, initially concentrated its efforts with the educational needs of the elite. Ramdoyal (1977) notes, for example, that "the Catholic authorities began to pay attention to the education of the lower classes only when their supremacy was threatened by the work of Lebrun" (p. 68). The

involvement of the Catholic Church into the welfare and education of the poor was sparked by the arrival on the island of Père Laval, a French Catholic priest, who took up the cause of the free slaves and devoted himself almost exclusively to their 'moral' development.

Laval was so successful that he won the island's entire black and coloured population to the Catholic Church. By the mid- nineteenth century, because of Laval's work and encouraged by the French elite who saw it as a way to retain their influence, the 'free coloured' and 'slaves' had been assimilated into main-stream French culture comprising French language and catholic religion, a trend which has remained in contemporary Mauritius (Chinapah, 1983, p.13).

In reaction to the religious regeneration and the reaffirmation of French influence that took place in the island between 1840-1870, the British Government is said to have tried to "make Mauritius English and Protestant instead of French and Catholic..." (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 69). At that time the *Lycée* became the Royal College and English became the official language of the Law Courts (1847). The government brought Anglican clergymen to the island in order to help build Anglican churches and schools in which English rather than the French language was to be used (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 70). Having lost their influence with the Creole population, the British authorities started looking into the education of Indian indentured labourers.

By the early 1850s, it had become clear that large numbers of Indians were settling on Mauritius rather than returning to India as first thought. Higginson, the British Governor of Mauritius drew the attention of both the local and the British governments to the

destitution of this Indo-Mauritian population and the need to improve their condition through education. Furthermore, Higginson was convinced that the education of Indians would not only bring social order but also, due to the fact that by now they had outnumbered the other communities, it would benefit Mauritian society at large (Ramdoyal, 1977).

The education of the "General Population" (consisting of freed slaves, coloured and white people) was provided concurrently by the government schools and the French and English mission schools. Because of the diversity of languages used by the Indian population, Higginson's advice was to create separate schools in which Indians could be taught in their own languages. His advice however did not meet the approval of a special committee set up to look into the education of Indians. The report of that Committee (1855) is summarised by Ramdoyal in this way:

The committee reported that out of 23,500 Creole children who were in an age to learn, only 5,500 were learning at all; and of these 1,649 were receiving higher kind of education; leaving to 3,850 a lower kind of education, and to 18,000 no education whatever; to those were to be added 5,500 Indian children. The committee remarked upon the indifference of parents, both Creole and Indian, to the value of education, and recommended that education should be rendered compulsory and that the number of schools should be increased. At the same time it deprecated the institution of separate schools for Indian children (Ramdoyal 1977, p. 82).

The Committee feared that the separation of Indian and Creole children would foster divisions between 'races' and prevent the fusion of the immigrant population. The Committee also affirmed its belief that it would be advantageous for Indian children to be educated in French. The Committee recommendations, Ordinance 21 of 1857, placed all primary schools under the supervision of the Education Council, made education

compulsory for "all boys between the age of six and ten inclusive" and stated that the French language was to be the medium of instruction; but that English should be taught in every school"(Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 83).

Ordinance 21 of 1857 was opposed by the Court of Directors of the India Company who, although they were said to be in favour of compulsory education, were also concerned by the fact that the colony was forcing a system of education upon Indian children which did not include their mother tongue. Following this opposition, school attendance for children became optional rather than compulsory (Ramdoyal, 1977, pp. 84-85). It was only in 1991, that education became compulsory in Mauritius.

The Indo-Mauritian group, unlike the Creoles had, since their arrival on the island, strongly resisted assimilation into mainstream French culture. Ramdoyal (1977), for example notes that the efforts made in the course of time to convert and de-culturise this group were strongly resisted. The Indian labourers, trapped as they were in a hostile world, "had tried to bring India to Mauritius by recreating its traditions, social structures, religious practices, and by persisting to speak its different vernaculars"(1977, p. 91). Formal schools of the nineteenth century were based on Western cultural and religious norms and incorporated into the curricula, languages, practices and biases which the Indians saw as detrimental to the continued survival of their own cultural heritage. This heritage was better preserved in the socio-religious associations called the baitkas and madressas, in which the ancestral languages could be passed on to their children (Ramdoyal, 1977, p.92).

Ordinance 21 of 1857 also led to the establishment of the Grant-in Aid (GIA) system by

the British Colonial Government in order to increase educational opportunities for Hindo-Mauritians. In that system, which was chosen because it was cheaper to run than government schools, GIA schools obtained grants from the government and donations from individuals. The introduction of the GIA system led to some increase in educational provision. By 1882, Mauritius had forty-seven government schools with 6, 571 pupils enrolled pupils and fifty-seven GIA schools with 5, 316 pupils enrolled. This GIA system reinforced the power of the Catholic church in Mauritian educational matters since most of the GIA schools were under its tutelage and, as such, had very little impact on the mass schooling of the Indo-Mauritian children (Ramdoyal, 1977). The 1908, census shows for example that only approximately 7,000 out of 60,000 Indians of school age attended school in that year.

The quality of education provided in Mauritius in the first part of the twentieth century was also very bleak.

Schools exist in Mauritius and cannot be closed; but they were better closed than remain monuments of wasted money and useless energy, where children are looked after, perhaps kept out of mischief, but certainly not educated. (Report of Dr Bateman, Director of Education in Mauritius (1901-1923) quoted in Ramdoyal 1977, p.117).

Ramdoyal (1977) describes learning in all schools at the beginning of the twentieth century as exclusively "bookish and literary" with the exception of some gardening, staffing as unsatisfactory especially in government schools where, after some time, unsuited volunteer teachers came to the habit of establishing a claim to a paid job (p.119).



By 1941, there were 50 government schools attended by approximately 16,000 pupils and prospects were as bleak as ever (Ramdoyal, 1977). The unhygienic and cramped conditions of schools lead the second director of education to remark: "If I were shown a rabbit-hutch and told it was a school, I should believe it" (Ramdoyal, 1977, p. 117). On the other hand, there were 75 GIA schools which provided education to some 16,000 pupils which according to Ramdoyal (1977), especially those belonging to the Anglican and Roman Catholic Missions had done "excellent work" (p.119).

By the early 1940s, the provision, quality and anything related to Mauritian education had grown in complexity. Teachers in the government-aided Anglican and Catholic schools would, for example, have preferred to work for the government in order to gain a pension, but as well as the parents of their Anglican and Catholic pupils, objected if the government took control of their schools and suppressed their religious influence. Hindu and Muslim pupils, schooling in the Christian GIA schools, the "confessional schools", on the other hand, were inclined to object to leaving the schools in the hands of the Christian authorities, as this meant that they were obliged to take religious education and not receive instruction in their own languages in those schools (Ramdoyal, 1977).

This growing complexity led the government to develop an administrative device in order to cope with educational provision. To that end, the 1944 Ordinance created a system of what is known as "dual control" over the state aided schools. By the 1944 Ordinance, managers of each aided primary school, who previously could hire and fire as they pleased, were now answerable to an education authority<sup>32</sup> for the good

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<sup>32</sup> A governing body established by the authority of a religious denomination or by private groups for the purpose of administering one or more primary or secondary schools (Ramdoyal, 1977, p.121).

administration of their schools. Grants were paid to the education authority and in 1952, teachers in aided schools were made pensionable (Randoyal, 1977, p. 121). Now the teaching of Oriental languages was introduced in some schools including confessional schools. The 1944 Ordinance also introduced the uniformity of examination for the primary system throughout the island, in which schools arranged their own internal examinations for the lower grades, while a common external examination was given on the same day throughout the island to the pupils of Standard VI, the last level of primary education.

The constitutional reforms of 1947 gave Mauritian people a representative government. Furthering educational opportunity for those people denied opportunity to go to school rather than provide further education for those already schooling became the priority of the new politicians (Annual Report on Education in Mauritius, 1949). "Education for all" became the new political slogan, "on the principle that a literate and intelligent population is the best guarantee of future economic wisdom" (cited in Meade, 1968, p. 206).

This commitment of 'education for all', coincided with strong demand for Western type education among the Indian population. Benedict (1958) notes that, at that time, economic betterment was a strong incentive for increased demand. Benedict (1958) explains that with the top posts in the sugar sector firmly in the hand of the White and Creole elites, with commerce and trade under the control of the Gujaratis and Chinese, government employment and the professions offered the most feasible alternative to work in the fields for young Indians, and adds that, despite the fact that government employment was fast reaching saturation, it continued to be perceived as: "the way out

of the fields and the key that opens that way is education" (p 320). Prestige is also said to act as a strong incentive for Western education. Benedict puts it this way:

There is pride in having passed an examination and in receiving a certificate and often considerable pressure to succeed is applied by a family on a student. The student is permitted special privileges by his family. He is not expected to do manual work. He is given money from what is often a slim budget, for transport, books, food and entertainment as well as for special tutoring .... Many parents are faced with the choice of investing in an education for their sons or in capital assets such as land and livestock. Increasingly and especially in the towns, they are choosing education (Benedict, 1958, p. 320).

This increasing demand for education was matched by increasing amount of funds for the expansion of primary education which, as Table 14 shows, led to a 48% growth in the number of children enrolled in primary schools in the short period of five years.

**TABLE 14: PRIMARY EDUCATION ENROLMENT IN MAURITIUS 1955-1960**

	1955-56	1956-57	1957-58	1958-59	1959-60
In all schools	85,446	89,434	102,291	115,629	126,173

Figures include government and aided and non -aided schools.

Source: Annual Reports on Education in Mauritius 1955-1960. Port Louis: National Printers.

The fast expansion of provision of primary schooling however met criticism. To Meade, a commentator of Mauritian society in the late 1960s, the government did not match its ambitious programme with the necessary resources. Many classes, for example were on double shift. Nor did that programme solve the language issues in Mauritian schools.

Meade (1968) notes that as a result:

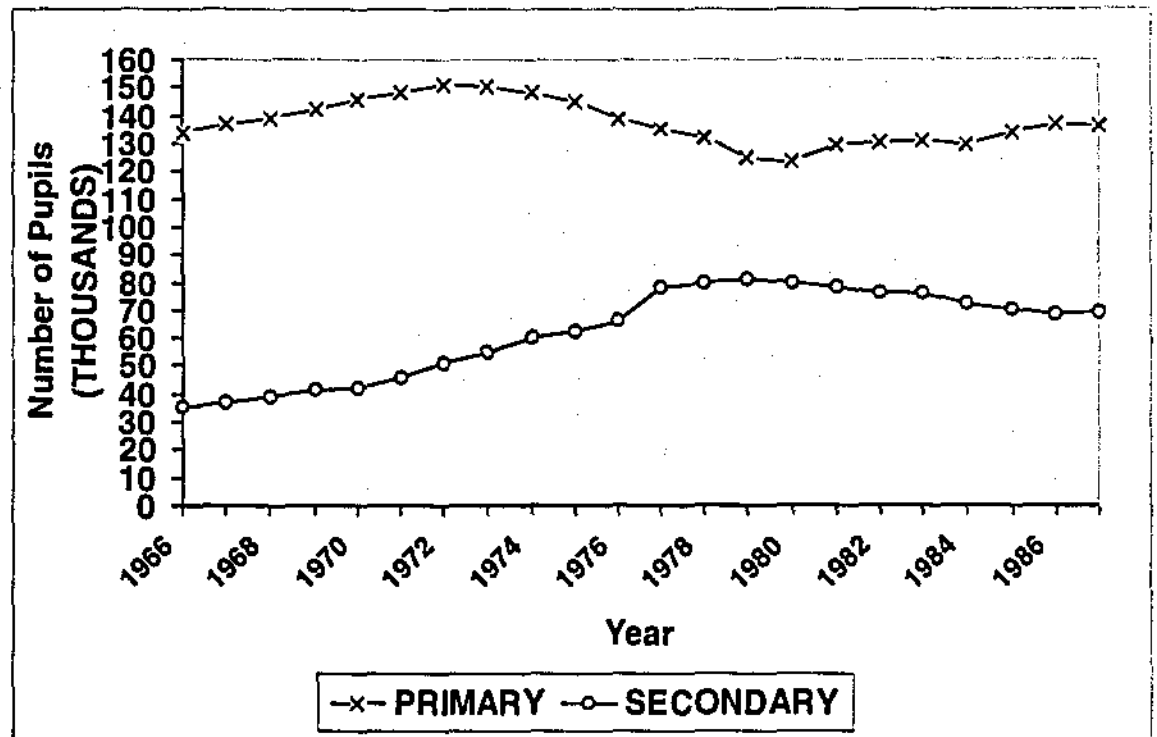
There is unfortunately very good reason for doubting whether the present primary school system will produce literacy. In fact it is not too much to say that the system at present operating is more likely to produce illiteracy ... Children leave primary schools in large numbers without having acquired anything worth calling literacy in any language though they have spent an intolerable amount of time dabbling in all three (1968, p. 207).

The three languages Meade refers to are English, French and one of the many Oriental Languages. Ordinance 31 of 1941 ensured the spread of English in Mauritius and in government schools, French took second place. However, English was not enforced as a compulsory language in the GIA schools with the result that in the Roman Catholic Aided schools, French alone was taught and in Protestant schools English alone was taught. Indian languages, as explained earlier, had no place in the primary school system until the early 1940s. The colonial imprint made it impossible for Hindo-Mauritians to secure the teaching of Oriental Languages in government schools. This changed as pressure mounted by the Indian communities in the wake of majority rule slowly led to the beginning in the provision of Oriental Language teaching. As there were very few qualified teachers of Oriental Languages, some schools did not provide for the teaching of Oriental Languages.

Meade (1968) criticised the government for having concentrated its efforts solely on primary education as opposed to a more evenly balanced programme of educational development at all levels. Figure 3 is an illustration of such imbalance which lasted well into the 1980s. It shows that in 1968 there were approximately 140,000 pupils enrolled in primary school and only approximately 40,000 in the secondary sector. By the late 1960s, the demand for more secondary education led the secondary sector to develop

patterns of provision, selection and reputation which are explained in the following. These patterns are still in place in Mauritius in the late 1990s.

FIGURE 3: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY ENROLMENTS 1966 -1987



Source: MEAC (1989). *Mauritius Country Paper*. International symposium on education held between April 3rd-7th 1989 in Mauritius.

In the 1970s, secondary education in Mauritius was provided in state colleges and private colleges. At that time, there were seven State Colleges (two Royal Colleges for boys, the Maurice Curé State Secondary School, the Queen Elizabeth College<sup>33</sup> for girls, the College John Kennedy, the State College Rose Belle and the State College in Pamplémousse) and twelve Junior Secondary Schools (newly built with funds from the World Bank). Places in the seven State Colleges were reserved for the winners of the Junior scholarship and for pupils in order of merit after these winners. For these reasons,

<sup>33</sup> Mauritian girls had to wait until 1957 to get a state secondary college, a wait that lasted 160 years in comparison to boys. The first college for boys, the Royal College was established in 1797.

state colleges, which comprised approximately 23% of the total secondary pupils, were regarded as better colleges (Ramdoyal, 1977, p.141).

The great majority of pupils (77%) were educated in private colleges. It must be emphasised at this point that private colleges in Mauritius do not have the same elitist connotation as they would have in Europe or Australia<sup>34</sup>. Mauritian private colleges (just as primary schools) are for the most part grant aided (GIA) and a few are non-aided. Private colleges were and still are of two types. A dozen of these private colleges were religious establishments (among them six Loreto Convent schools, the Hindu Girls College, the Islamic Cultural College and the Collège du St Esprit). Places in these few private colleges, which have become known as Confessional Colleges were also reserved for scholarships winners and just as with State Colleges, because of their selectiveness, most of these colleges acquired a good name.

In the early 1970s, strong demand led to the mushrooming of another type of private college. Bunwaree describes these colleges as "more poorly resourced than the others" (1994, p 121). The *Mauritius country paper* (1989), describes them as institutions of "uneven standing" (p.14) while Ramdoyal (1977) states that these colleges were "primarily designed to be profit making ... The majority are, in effect, no more than factories for the mass production of certificate holders"<sup>35</sup> (p.141).

At independence, the education system was brought under the direct control of a Minister of Education and a centralised administrative system in which "powers were

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<sup>34</sup> There are only two secondary schools of that elitist type in Mauritius: Lycée Labourdonnais and Bocage.

<sup>35</sup> In 1978 the Private Secondary School Authority (PSCA) was created to look after the running of private schools.

clearly defined and delegated to the relevant bodies", and remains almost unchanged in post-independence Mauritius (Bunwaree, 1994, p. 91). From that time, education, which in 1976 was made non-fee paying, also became seen as an essential component for the country's economic development plan. The first National Development Plan 1971-1975 is unequivocal in that regard.

The most important resource of Mauritius is its manpower. A well-motivated labour force possessing the requisite mental and physical skills for a modern economy is the most valuable economic asset. While cultural background and progress of education in Mauritius has provided the basis for an intelligent and adaptable labour force, there is a need to create the skills required to meet the demand generated by prospective economic development. This would require a change in the in the quality and content of education from its present generally academic emphasis to more technical and vocational orientation at all levels (p.68)<sup>36</sup>.

The subsequent National Development Plans: 1975-1980; 1980-1982; 1984-1986; 1988-1990, all strongly emphasise a strong desire to bring schooling in line with the world of work. Similarly, in the 1992-1994 Development Plan, the opening statements with reference to education in the nation declare:

Education is widely perceived as the major avenue for social and economic mobility. In addition to being a vehicle for social upgrading for the individual, rising literacy and widespread education facilities have enabled the country to effect its demographic transition and to diversify into new economic activities.

The rapid economic transformation of the country, especially in export processing, has been due to the availability of an educated workforce. The ability of Mauritius to continue to adapt flexibly to new market opportunities and to

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<sup>36</sup> Bunwaree (1994) notes that "a number of projects were financed by the World Bank, but by the end of the 1971-1975 plan, vocational education had not achieved the desired result namely, to reduce unemployment. Critics went as far as to say that vocational education did not even get off the ground in spite of the government effort" (p. 101). In the Education Master Plan (1991) it is also noted that "because of the inherent academic bias characterising the education system . . . and the generally low status of technical jobs in the employment market... vocational and technical education has experienced a relatively slow evolution in Mauritius" (MEAC, 1991, p. 144).

move into more technologically-oriented production, depends on education producing the required skills. The educational system is called upon to foster a culture of creativity, develop initiative and nurture talent-- all of which are essential for Mauritius to maintain its competitive edge and thus guarantee sustained development (p.83).

In 1991, following the 1990 Jomtien Conference on "*Education for All*", the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MEAC) in Mauritius produced the *Education Master Plan for the year 2000*. Prime Minister Jugnauth's foreword message as well as that of the Education Minister Parsuranam, illustrate the Mauritian official vision of education at this time.

... A proper educational system has a key role to play in the economic and social development of our country and the welfare of our citizens. We live in a world of fierce competition. Our prosperity, indeed our survival, depends on the quality of our labour force . . . Our schools and institutions of higher learning must brace themselves to face this challenge . . . Our commitment to education is illustrated by the fact that, despite difficulties, and outside pressures, we have maintained the principle of free education from primary schools to university. Free education however should not mean poor education. The results from these institutions depend on the earnest efforts of those who teach and those who study in them. It is through the efforts of teachers and students that the schools will be able to achieve the objectives of the Government. Parents also have a special role to play, and can deeply influence the quality of education. The prime objective is not merely to prepare young people for work. Our future as a sound society depends on mutual respect, mutual tolerance and mutual understanding which, as individuals and as citizens, we have for one another. Schools have a major responsibility in this area. They must help to wipe out the vestiges of prejudice which separate some citizens from others (Ministry of Education Arts and Culture, 1991).

In his own foreword to the *Master Plan*, The Minister of Education, Armoogum Parsuraman states:



It is the aim of the [Education] Master Plan to establish a long term strategy embodying Government's vision of a system of education which will ensure universal access to quality basic education, provide possibilities of further education and training opportunities, meet the needs of the economy, sustain balanced economic and social development and reinforce international competitiveness. This strategy should help us to achieve a smooth transition to the second industrial development phase, leading Mauritius towards newly industrialised status (MEA, 1991).

These messages emphasise among other things a strong "human capital" vision of education. As previously discussed, the first stage of industrialisation in Mauritius required a low skill labour force. With a change in emphasis towards a more high technology industry, what this vision means is explained by Bunwaree (1994) who notes:

The achievement of the education system this time would perhaps be to equip some [people] with the motivation, knowledge and intellectual skills required at the highest level of the economy, others will be provided with the skills and attitudes required for the manufacturing; and others still will be excluded as not possessing the potential needed for use in the economy (p.104).

The Prime Minister's message also emphasises harmony. In Mauritius, schooling just as housing, mentioned previously, is not segregated along ethnic or religious lines. Not only do Mauritian children live side by side and intermingle in shops, buses, towns and villages, they also school together<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Government and GIA schools accept pupils of all religious and ethnic grouping: Hindu pupils are found in schools run by the Roman Catholic Authority, Catholic and Anglican pupils are found in Government schools. Government and GIA schools provide the same curriculum and cater for the specific needs of their pupils. In each of these schools, depending on demand oriental languages and religious education (catechism) are taught to the relevant pupils.

This section has shown that the history of education in Mauritius is one of gradual expansion from provision for the white elite group during the early colonial period to a present system of free-education which includes children of all classes, sex and ethnic origin. The next section explains how the Mauritian education system is organised.

### **The structure of the Mauritian education system**

The structure of the Mauritian school system presented is based on a 6+5+2 system inherited from Britain. It comprises six years of primary education leading to the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), followed by five years of lower secondary education leading to the Cambridge School Certificate (SC) and a further two years of higher secondary education leading to the Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) and followed by higher education.

At present, 96% of Mauritian children are enrolled in primary school for six years (in 1996, 124,589 pupils were enrolled in Mauritian primary schools 63,210 boys and 61,379 girls). 47% of primary entrants proceed to secondary schooling (in 1996, 93,037 pupils were enrolled in Mauritian secondary schools 45,566 boys and 47,471 girls). The tertiary enrolment remains at a low 2.2% in comparison with other countries with similar level of economic development. Fiji's tertiary enrolment stands at 12%, Barbados at 17%, Malaysia's at 7.2%, and Thailand's at 15.7% (UNDP, 1994). Figure 4 in Appendix E displays the structure of the Mauritian school system.

### **Tertiary education**

Tertiary education was made free in Mauritius in 1988. The University of Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute all offer tertiary education.

The University of Mauritius, established in the early 1960s, had a total enrolment of 2,496 for the year 1996-1997. The University offers 133 degrees in the areas of Agriculture, Engineering, Sciences, Law, Social Sciences and Humanities.

The Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), created in 1973 under recommendation from UNESCO and UNDP, had a total enrolment of 3,061 for the year 1996-1997. The MIE offers a series of different courses ranging from the Post-Graduate Certificate of Education to the Teachers Certificate for those engaged (or to be engaged) in teaching and educational administration.

The Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) (which also comprises a secondary school with approximately 800 students) was established and funded by the government of India in 1976. The MGI has a total tertiary enrolment of 626 for the year 1996-1997 and offers courses at the certificate, diploma and degree level in Indian dancing, fine arts and languages.

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), established in 1988, is the agent for the planning and coordinating of tertiary education.

## Secondary education

**TABLE 15: SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MAURITIUS 1996**

<b>Schools</b>	Total	130
	Government	29
	Private	101
<b>Pupils</b>	Total	93,037
	Boys	45,566
	Girls	47,471
	21 % in state schools 79% in private schools	
<b>Teaching Staff</b>		4,564
<b>Non Teaching Staff</b>		2, 392
<b>Pupil/Teacher ratio</b>		20

Source: Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD) (1997b). *Economic Indicators: An Occasional Paper. Education Statistics, 1996*. Port Louis: Ministry of Economic Planning & Development

In 1996, there were 130 secondary schools in Mauritius, 29 state schools and the rest were privately run. The private schools are allocated government funds through the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA). The majority is trained at the Mauritius Institute of Education with qualifications ranging from a Certificate in Education, BEd, Dip.Ed., and Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

The objectives of secondary education are stated as follows in the *Master Plan*:

- To complete the process of basic education which is started in primary school
- To provide the general basis for training in specific skills.
- To prepare pupils for obtaining the qualifications needed for entry into higher education both locally and abroad.
- To help identify the aptitudes of individual students, and guide them towards appropriate studies.
- To help inculcate in students, values and attitudes conducive to a better understanding of our plural society and the need for a healthy living (MEAC, *Master Plan*, 1991).

The strengths and weaknesses of the secondary sector are listed in the *Master Plan*. Strengths are in terms of some improvement with regard to teacher training and the comparability of pass rates at the SC and HSC between Mauritius and 'industrialised countries'. In addition to problems related to high rates of repetition and drop out, the following are listed as the major weaknesses of the secondary system.

The non-governmental schools in general have fewer academically qualified teachers than the state schools; they have a higher pupil/teacher ratio; many of them are poorly equipped and housed. Since certain State and Confessional schools have a high reputation, they attract the best candidates and hence obtain the best results. At the other extreme, there are a small number of institutions, which are a real disgrace to the system (MEAC, *Master Plan*, 1991, p.35).

The question of reputation for secondary schools is a well-known phenomenon in Mauritius. Several colleges have over the years acquired a 'good' to 'very high reputation' while others have not. Pupils who want to school in colleges, known as "*les bons collèges* (the good colleges)" and these include all of the 29 government colleges plus some Confessional Colleges, have to rank at the Certificate of Primary Education, the examination taken at the end of the primary cycle. A pass at CPE gives other pupils access to the 'other colleges'.

Data from the Mauritius Examination Services (MES) shows that in 1996, 5,698 out of the 16,737 pupils who passed the CPE examination were ranked and thus able to choose their college. It also shows that 71 colleges (37 for girls and 34 for boys) took ranked pupils, while it was not necessary to rank in order to gain admittance in the 59 remainders. Table 16 is compiled from the 1997 Mauritius Examinations Syndicate list

of admission to the 71 secondary schools which took ranked pupils (Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, 1997c). Table 16 lists some of the secondary colleges for which pupil intake is at the top of the CPE ranking table (that is pupils with the highest ranks among the 5,698 ranked pupils). The table also indicates the range of rank level accepted by each of these colleges in their 1997 intake.

**TABLE 16: 1997 INTAKE IN SOME HIGH DEMAND COLLEGES ACCORDING TO PUPILS RANKING AT THE 1996 CPE EXAMINATION**

COLLEGES	RANKING RANGE (out of 5,698 pupils ranked at the 1996 CPE exam)
<u>Girls colleges</u>	
Queen Elizabeth College (government college)	1 - 147
Loreto Convent, Quatre Bornes	19 - 328
Dr Maurice Cure State Secondary School	148 - 293
Loreto Convent, Curepipe	165 - 430
Loreto Convent, Port Louis	202 - 579
Mahatma Gandhi Institute	309 - 473
Loreto Convent, Rose Hill	408 - 583
Gaaetan Raynal State Secondary School	358 - 859
<u>Boys colleges</u>	
Royal College Curepipe	2 - 158
Royal College Port Louis	6 - 277
College du St Esprit	1 - 294
St Joseph College	101 - 399
Mahatma Gandhi Institute	272 - 409
John Kennedy College (government college)	296 - 627
St Mary's College	400 - 537
College de la Confiance	584 - 733

Source: Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES) 1997c, *Admission to secondary schools, 1997 intake (1996 CPE exam): List of schools*. Reduit: Mauritius Examination Syndicate.

This table shows that the "Star Colleges" (as they are known in Mauritius) among the 'good colleges' are similar to those in the 1970s. Colleges such as Queen Elizabeth, Maurice Curé State Secondary School and Loreto Convents admit the most highly ranked girls, while the Royal Colleges and St Esprit admit the most highly ranked boys. Table 16 also shows that the "Star Colleges" are a mixture of government and private

establishments. As 71 colleges (among them the 29 state colleges) take ranked pupils, the list of 18 colleges (table 16) is by no means comprehensive. As explained earlier, the remainder of 'good colleges' admit students who have ranked among the first 5,698 among a total of 16, 629 passes at the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE).

Out of the 101 private secondary schools in Mauritius, forty-one are on the list of colleges which take ranked pupils. Some of these colleges on the list, as explained in the table above, are considered Star Colleges. The earlier quote mentions another kind of college, "a small number of institutions which are a real disgrace to the system" (MEAC, 1991, p.35). The following extract from an article published in the Week- End, a Mauritian newspaper (15 September 1996), reports the concerns expressed by the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE) with regard to those second rate colleges.

There are ninety-six private secondary colleges in Mauritius<sup>38</sup>. Among these, the twenty confessional ones (mostly Catholic) are no problem while twenty-three others are sub-standard. The latter are run as family profit making businesses and do not conform to minimal norms of education provision .... [they are plagued by] poor ventilation in classrooms, lack of recreational space, poor relation between teachers and their employers and on the whole a very deplorable working environment for some 10,000 pupils (Week-End, 15 Sept. 1995).

The 11,039 pupils who do not rank but pass the CPE examination are left with a choice of 60 private colleges in which to continue their secondary education, 23 of which are "sub-standard" according to this quote and, according to what has been said earlier, none of which include best achievers in their intake as they have been absorbed by the "good colleges".

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<sup>38</sup> Official figures (Table 15) show that there were 101 secondary private schools in Mauritius in 1996.

The secondary cycle spans seven years from Form I to Form V at the end of which students take the School Certificate (SC) and from Form VI Lower to Form VI Upper at the end of which students take the Higher Education Certificate (HEC). Tables 17 and 18 show the results of these examinations for the year 1996.

**TABLE 17: CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR MAURITIUS 1994-1996**

Year	No. Examined	No. of Passes	% of Passes
1994	11,480	7,563	65.9
1995	12,089	8,494	70.3
1996	12,846	9,626	74.9

Compiled from: Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES) (1997a) *School Certificate Performance of School Candidates 1986-1995*. Reduit: Mauritius Examination Syndicate.

**TABLE 18: CAMBRIDGE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR MAURITIUS 1994-1996**

Year	No Examined	No of Passes	% of Passes
1994	5,009	3,171	63.3
1995	5,319	3,528	66.3
1996	5,257	3,619	68.8

Compiled from: Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES) (1997b) *Higher School Certificate Performance of School Candidates 1986-1995*. Reduit: Mauritius Examination Syndicate.

Mauritian students who pass the Higher Education Certificate have several options if they want to continue their education. They may enroll at the University of Mauritius the MIE, MGI. All these institutions provide free education. They may also compete for approximately 70 undergraduate scholarships offered to them by foreign governments.



In 1994 Australia offered twelve undergraduate scholarships, Canada six, United Kingdom eighteen, France twenty, China eight and Egypt one (Ministry of Education & Science, 1995).

## Primary education

**TABLE 19: PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MAURITIUS 1996**

Schools	Total	281	* 51 Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCEA) 2 Hindu Education Authority 8 private unaided
	Government	220	
	Private	61*	
Pupils	Total	124,589	
	Boys	63,210	
	Girls	61,379	
		76% in Government schools	
		24% in aided and non-aided schools	
Personnel			
Teaching staff		5,215	
	General purpose teachers	3,727	
	Asian language teachers	1,488	
Non teaching staff		3,153	
Head teachers (HT)		276	
Deputy head teachers (DHT)		1,009*	
Other administrative and manual workers		1,868	
			*some DHT teach others do not
Pupil/Teacher ratio			

Source: Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD) (1997b). *Economic Indicators: An Occasional Paper. Education Statistics, 1996*. Port Louis: Ministry of Economic Planning & Development, (MEPD).

Primary education is free (1976) and compulsory (1991) and in 1996 was provided in 281 schools. Of these, 233 are Government schools and 61 are private schools (51 Roman Catholic, two Hindu Education Authority are GIA schools, the rest are privately run and non-religious). The enrolment rate is approximately 98% and in 1996 the primary school population was 124, 589.

Subjects taught in primary school include English, French, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Creative Education, Physical Education, seven Oriental languages (Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi and Mandarin) for pupils who choose to study one of them and optional catechism for Catholic children. Nearly 70% of the primary school population study one oriental language (MES, 1996, p.5). Primary education spans six years in six standards (I-VI). Pupils enter Standard I at the age of five and promotion to upper standard is automatic. Pupils take an examination at the end of each term<sup>39</sup> and the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) after six years of schooling.

Teachers employed in Government primary schools are recruited by the Public Service Commission (PSC) on the basis of a competitive written test and an interview<sup>40</sup>. All prospective teachers must possess a minimum of five credits at SC Examination and in the subjects of French, English and Mathematics. Newly recruited and appointed teachers follow a two-year course at the Mauritius Institute of Education before they are appointed in a teaching position.

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<sup>39</sup> Term examination papers are set by the Ministry for STD V and STD VI. In lower grades examination papers are prepared by teachers.

<sup>40</sup> For private aided primary schools by the Roman Catholic Authority and Hindu Aided Authority.

The objectives of the primary education in Mauritius are stated as follows in the *Master*

*Plan:*

- To provide a grounding in basic skills such as reading, writing and numeration and help to produce the linguistic capacity needed in a multi-lingual society;
- To encourage the child to observe, to think and to develop a sense of growing autonomy;
- To enable the child to develop values and attitudes relevant to the society in which he [sic] is growing up;
- To make him aware of his cultural roots and give him some appreciation of cultures other than his own and thus to contribute towards nation building.
- To help the child to develop his potential to the full;
- To develop a knowledge of healthy living and an appreciation of the natural environment (MEAC, 1991, p. 25).

The merits and weaknesses of the primary school system are stated as follows in the

*Master Plan:*

Merits

- The primary school system is free, non-discriminatory and open to all children.
- The enrolment rate is high.
- Every Village Council Area has at least one primary school. Most schools are solidly built and in reasonable condition.
- More than 97% of the teachers hold a school certificate or its equivalent.
- There is a coherent training programme for new entrants in the profession.
- The MIE has embarked on a major programme for the upgrading of primary school teachers.
- The curriculum has been revised and updated during the past decade.
- Textbooks covering all subjects areas taught in primary schools are issued to children free of charge.
- Schools have been encouraged to set up libraries to develop and foster reading habits.
- Government has encouraged Parents Teachers Associations especially through the payment of basic and matching grants (MEAC, 1991, p. 25).

## Weaknesses

- The schools and especially the higher standards are excessively geared to success in the CPE. Thus many of the functions which the schools should perform take second place, and there is frequently a tendency for non-examinable subjects to be squeezed out of the curriculum. There is strong pressure on children, especially in standards five and six to take private tuition.
- There is a wide gap between the highest and lowest achieving schools in terms of success at CPE. Thus in 1990, 52 schools had pass rates in the CPE of 70% or more, while 15 schools had pass rates of less than 30%. There is a hard core of schools which normally obtain poor results.
- The CPE itself selects children for entry into secondary schools and allocates them as between the more and less popular colleges. But it is an inadequate indication of the child's abilities.
- The curriculum is excessively rigid and makes insufficient allowance for children of different abilities.
- The combination of automatic promotion with a lack of remedial assistance for slow learners means that children who fall behind are likely to remain behind.
- There are deficiencies in the provision of support services, teaching aids and equipment standards of maintenance are generally unsatisfactory. There is no programme for the regular maintenance and repair of school buildings, furniture and equipment, thus repairs and maintenance are frequently delayed.
- There has in the past been insufficient provision for in service training of teachers.
- In some schools, there is a high rate of absenteeism among pupils and teaching staff (MEAC, 1991, pp. 25-26).

The primary sector also has its "star schools" which, as in the secondary sector, may be government or private aided schools. In the primary sector, a school acquires the status of "star school" when a percentage of its entrants, year after year, rank among the first 500 at the CPE examination. The principal characteristics of the CPE examination are described in what follows.

### **The certificate of primary education examination**

The CPE was first introduced in 1978. Prior to that date, there were two examinations at the end of the primary cycle: a pass/fail examination known as the Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC) and a selective exercise called the Junior Scholarship Examination organised by Moray House of Edinburgh which gave access to secondary colleges. These two examinations were considered to be traumatic for ten to eleven year olds who had to sit for these two examinations within a period of one month. As secondary schooling was made free and demand for places in government and high standards secondary schools/colleges soon came to exceed available places, the CPE examination came to serve the dual purposes of certification and selection of students for placement in 'good' secondary schools (Dulloo Report, 1993, pp. 22-23).

The CPE has been completely Mauritianised since 1980 (MEAC, 1991, p.83) and in contrast with SC and HSC examinations, is organised annually by the Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES)<sup>41</sup> in collaboration with the MIE and the MGI. A blueprint defining objectives from the topics of the syllabus is first prepared. The required number of items to be tested for the required level of objectives is laid down in a grid against which CPE papers and questions are set. The papers are prepared by "qualified and especially trained" people from the above institutions and are subsequently moderated by another team, taking into consideration that the blueprint has been followed, that no mistakes have been left in the paper. Marking on the other hand is carried out anonymously by teachers and inspectors. Each examiner marks only

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<sup>41</sup> The MES was established by Act of Parliament in 1984. Its objectives: to organise and conduct examinations, to help promote a sound system of education, to award certificates and to cooperate with other examination bodies. The MES also organises the first cycle secondary School Certificate (SC) and the second cycle secondary Higher School Certificate (HSC) in collaboration with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.

one question per paper and once marked the papers are sent to another group for revision, followed by quality control in which “higher level and better qualified people look more particularly at the marks of candidates scoring higher marks” (compiled from Dulloo Report, 1993 p. 26). Table 20 shows the CPE results for the years 1994-1996.

**TABLE 20: CPE EXAMINATION RESULTS IN MAURITIUS 1994-1996**

Year	No Examined	No of Passes	% of Passes
1994	29,535	18,074	61.2
1995	27,733	18,074	65.3%
1996	25.629	16,737	65.3%

Compiled from: MEPD (1997a). *Economic Indicators An Occasional Paper: Education Statistics 1996*: Table 8-Number and percentages of passes at CPE examinations by district 1994-1996, p. 5.

MES data shows that in 1996 there were 1,012 full-time and 1,410 part-time places in the Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB) training centres. These centres are the only options for children to continue their (compulsory) education until they reach age fifteen. In 1995, 9,659 pupils failed the CPE, 2,422 attended the IVTB centres and 7,237 children aged between 13 and 15 were left with no school to attend.

The CPE is a mixture of multiple choice questions, structured short answers, close test, composition type questions and some problem solving questions. In 1994 a reformulated CPE examination, which differentiates pupils’ learning competencies was introduced. The examination has been reformulated in line with the document “Learning Competencies for All” in which “Essential” and “Desirable” learning competencies for Standard IV, V and VI have been laid down. These changes have been made with a view to delineate a clearer and more systematic demarcation between “the certifying of

candidates' achievement and the ranking of best candidates for selection purposes". In "Learning Competencies for All", (MES, 1992) it is stated that for each subject there will be one single paper of duration 1 hour 45 minutes which will consist of two parts Section A and Section B.

Section A is addressed to the whole ability range and will assess the acquisition of Essential Learning Competencies (ELC) which all children should have mastered at the end of primary schooling. The questions set in this section will test mostly knowledge, understanding and simple problem solving skills and carries 60 marks.

Section B is addressed to the more able candidates and will assess primarily Desirable Learning Competencies (DLC) involving exercises of higher mental processes. The questions set in this section will test mainly understanding and application and will carry 40 marks.

The document indicates that the two sections in the one paper present the following advantages:

- (a) The questions are sequenced from easy to difficult.
- (b) The average candidate can attempt only Section A and will have more time to do the different questions contained in this part.
- (c) These candidates may also take up the challenge of attempting as many questions of Section B as they are able to cope with since no restriction will be imposed (MES, 1992).

Pupils completing section A successfully will lead to a pass. Completing section A and B successfully will lead to ranking.

- Certification

Compulsory subjects: English, Mathematics, French, Environmental Studies (4).

Optional subjects one Oriental Language: Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Arabic and modern Chinese.

French and English have been part of the curriculum for more than a century and are both compulsory in the primary school curriculum. Oriental languages (Arabic, Hindi, Marathi, Mandarin, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu) were introduced in the schools as optional subjects in the early 1940's, and since 1987 count for certification at CPE.

The minimum requirements to obtain a pass at CPE are: Grade E in each of the following: English, Mathematics and French and one Grade C or two Grades D from the following subjects: English, Mathematics, French, Environmental Studies, one Oriental Language (Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, 1995).

- Ranking

Until 1995, the formula for ranking at the CPE examination was as follows:

(a) For those offering Asian Languages, the marks obtained in English and Mathematics are to be added to the highest marks obtained in any two of the following subjects: French, Environmental Studies or an Asian Language; and



(b) For those not offering an Asian Language, the marks obtained in all the four subjects, viz English, Mathematics, French and Environment Studies are to be added together.

There were some extraordinary developments with regards to the CPE ranking system in 1995, extraordinary in the sense that they led to the fall of the Jugnauth government. The following account summarises these events<sup>42</sup>.

In the past decade, pressure and proposals have been made for counting Oriental Languages for ranking purposes at CPE. A Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly was appointed in May 1991 to examine the inclusion of Oriental Language into the CPE for ranking purposes. The recommendations of the Dulloo committee with regard to the inclusion of Oriental Languages for ranking purposes at the CPE were:

For pupils offering Oriental Languages the marks obtained in English and Maths to be added to the highest marks obtained in any two of the following : EVS, French or Oriental Languages .

For those not offering Oriental Languages the marks obtained in all 4 subjects English, Maths French and EVS to be added together.

Ranking to be implemented as from 1995 (Dulloo Report, 1993, p.56).

The impending implementation of these recommendations in late 1995 set diverse groups in motion, among them the *Front Commun pour la Justice au CPE* (Common Front for Justice at CPE) comprising Mauritians who were against the inclusion of Oriental

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<sup>42</sup> These events unfolded during and coincided with the first period of fieldwork in Mauritius (November 1995).

Languages and claimed that their children, having studied only four subjects, "would be discriminated against as the element of computing the marks in a subject in which they could have obtained higher marks would not be there" (Bissoondoyal Report, 1996, p. 2).

On the basis of injustice, and following actions by the "*Front Commun*", the inclusion of Oriental Languages was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Following this development, the Jugnauth's government, in favour of the inclusion of Oriental Languages for ranking purposes at the CPE, sought to include a new clause (17A) in the Mauritian Constitution. A parliamentary session was set up on the 15th of November 1995 in order for the Assembly to vote for the adoption of this new clause. The Prime Minister did not obtain 3/4 of the votes required to adopt the new clause and in the afternoon of the 16th of November 1995, informed the President that he had decided to dissolve the Assembly and to call for elections. The Jugnauth government not only lost these elections but did not gain any seat in Parliament as the winning party won a 60/0 election. The problem of inclusion of Oriental Languages for ranking at CPE has to date not been settled. In 1995, the old system was re-established. In 1996, following the work of a special Committee the old system was also in place but a certain number of places were reserved in the Mahatma Gandhi's Institute for the 'best pupils' in each Oriental language.

This chapter presented a selective account of Mauritian socio-cultural patterns as they have evolved over time. The first part has presented an overview of the circumstances, peoples and events which, over a rich and complex history, have marked and characterised Mauritian societal development, while the second part has focused more

specifically upon the educational development and structures within that societal context. Having set the national context, the next chapter enters the world of two Mauritian schools Terre Bleue and Four Hills<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> As explained earlier these two names are fictional.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF SCHOOL

This chapter introduces Four Hills and Terre Bleue primary schools, the people who frequent these two schools, their routines and activities. Data used for this chapter consists of excerpts of interview transcripts selected from part two of interviews, “the details of experience”. It also consists of observation notes, children’s stories and drawings<sup>44</sup>.

#### A description of the two schools

##### Four Hills

Four Hills is an urban “five star<sup>45</sup>” primary school located in the highly populated district of Mauritius called Plaines Wilhems. It has approximately 950 pupils and 45 teachers including specialists, trainee and deputy head teachers. Most teaching staff live in the district and have between 15 and 35 years experience. The gender mixture of the school is balanced. Most of the parents of pupils in Four Hills have good salaries, some have jobs with status. The pupils come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and most, but not all, live in the vicinity of the school.

The school is set in a busy, noisy residential area and it is reached by walking or driving through a maze of narrow streets. Its grounds are securely protected by part wall, part

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<sup>44</sup> The participants and the schools have been given fictitious names in order to protect their confidentiality. Participants’ names however reflect their respective ethnicity and gender.

<sup>45</sup> The HT of Four Hills defines 5 star schools as schools with “a high rate of passes, more than 70% at Certificate of Primary Education (CPE).

fence and a live-in keeper. Before and after the morning and afternoon bells, a myriad of ambulant shopkeepers selling foodstuffs, toys, cooking utensils and garments, appear by the gate in the hope of selling their wares to parents, teachers and pupils.

The very small school yard is tarred, which in spite of its harshness on children's knees, is said to be a real improvement by those who remember the dusty days of hard-packed ground. A few one storey concrete buildings covered by corrugated roofs make up the school complex. In these buildings, the upper grades classes are on the first floor, the lower grades are on the ground floor. The upper level classrooms are reached by a flight of external stairs and a verandah runs along the building length. Each classroom has a door opening onto that verandah.

Classrooms are similar in size and are separated by flimsy walls made of wood panels, where holes carved out by successive generations of bored students can be seen. On special occasions, the panels can be pushed aside so that a large room made of three classrooms can be used for meetings of parents and teachers associations (PTA), or for special occasions such the teachers' end of the year gathering. Louvered windows, some with broken panes, run along high on two sides of the classroom, the third side is taken-up by a large shiny blackboard.

In most classrooms, the dirt colour ceiling paint is flaking, the walls are dirty, some covered with graffiti, the paint is faded and in places shows patches of mould. On the whole, classrooms are unsightly and austere in their appearance. They are seldom decorated with pictures or children's work but some display a calendar here and there.

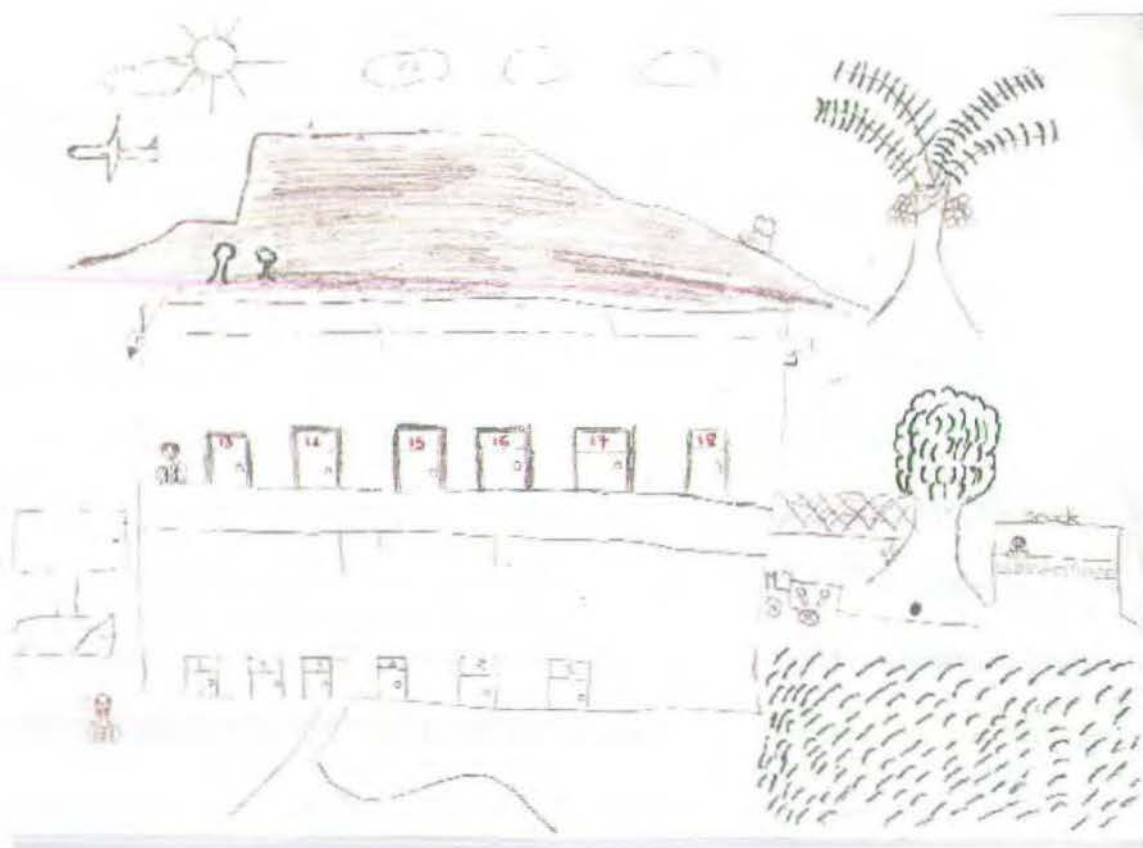


Illustration 1. Four Hills School (Drawn by a STD VI pupil in Four Hills).

Classroom arrangements are very similar throughout the school. Teachers' desks stand by the blackboard. They are small wooden tables which teachers sometimes cover with a pretty cloth. In some cases, but not all, this table has two lockable draws. In addition, teachers have a wooden low cabinet, which can also be locked. Some male teachers (because they are on the PTA board) have a two-door metal cabinet the size of a wardrobe in which they store PTA papers and also their own.

Desks and chairs are rather old, too small for some children and in desperate need of repair. In the lower grades, these desks are all wood and hand made. In upper grades,

they have a metal frame and legs and are factory made. Desks seat two pupils and have a shelf underneath, on which pupils can put books and other personal things. Nothing is left in these recesses at night, or even when children change rooms for the study of oriental languages. Every day children carry all their books and belongings in their school bags to and from school.

In all classrooms, desks are neatly arranged in rows. They face both the teacher's desk and the blackboard. Because Four Hills is a "five star school", demand is high and some classrooms especially in upper grades have up to 50 pupils. In such cases, there is no room for teachers or children to walk behind or on either side of the classroom. In less populated classes, there is room at the back for a few empty desks and this is where lunch bags and "*tentes*"<sup>46</sup> are usually kept. Sometimes, in the absence of empty desks, lunch bags and "*tentes*" are hooked on nails at the back of the classroom. Regardless of the space in the classroom, teachers conduct class while seated at their desks or standing in front of the blackboard and pupils sit at their desks when they are in class.

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<sup>46</sup> Traditionally, a *tente* is a small basket in the shape of a shoe box standing up. It has a lid and a longish handle. It is made of coconut material and is used by Mauritian school children and workers alike to carry their lunches. The child in Illustration 5 carries a *tente*



Illustration 2. STD III classroom's arrangement in Four Hills (Drawn by a STD III pupil in Four Hills).

The school office is a small and tidy room on the ground floor of one of the school buildings. It is shared by the Head Teacher (HT), the Deputy Head Teachers (DHT) and the secretary. Each sit wherever there happens to be room to do a specific administrative task or receive a visitor. No one has a specific or personal desk. The office is furnished with four tables also covered by pretty cloths, a large metal cabinet in which important registers, administrative documents, keys, the school supplies and at night, the telephone are kept. The office concrete floor is kept clean and its paint work is in better state than that in the classrooms.

The office has two small louvered windows, one opening onto a neighbour's garden the



other one to the school yard. Sitting at the desk by the latter window one can keep an eye on the school gate. Next to this window there is a small table where the book in which teachers have to sign their arrivals and departures is kept. The school bell is also held on that small table.

In addition, the school has a couple of small rooms specifically used for teaching oriental languages and a larger room originally intended to be a staff room but utilised for everything else but that purpose. This larger room is furnished with a large wooden table, benches and about twenty children's desks. It has a variety of book shelves where some library and teachers' resource books are kept behind locked glass doors. The key is kept in the office and teachers told me that they very rarely use these books because they do not have time.

A cupboard houses a television set which was never used during the month I spent in the school. Teachers give many reasons for not using this set. They say that it does not work all that well and that they do not have time for such things. They also say that even if they did have the time, the room is used for so many things, it would be almost impossible to find the room empty for sufficient time during any given day when they and their pupils could watch television.

### **Terre Bleue**

Terre Bleue school is set in a big village surrounded by sugar cane fields. It is a two stream primary school located in the quieter parts of the Moka district. It has approximately 320 pupils and 25 teachers, two DHTs and one HT. As in Four Hills, the

teacher gender mixture is balanced but, in contrast, teachers on the whole are younger than in Four Hills. Most teachers do not live close by and come to school by bus or are given a lift by a relative or a friend. Children in Terre Bleue are on the whole from a poorer socio-economic background than in Four Hills school. Their parents work as local shopkeepers or sugar cane farmers. All children come from the catchment area and either walk or bus to school.

The grounds are rather small, enclosed by part wall, part fence on all sides and a gate which is securely locked every night. Two buildings, one with an upper floor, make up the school. As in Four Hills, upper grades are on the upper level and the lower grades are on the ground floor. The school yard is tarred and shady.

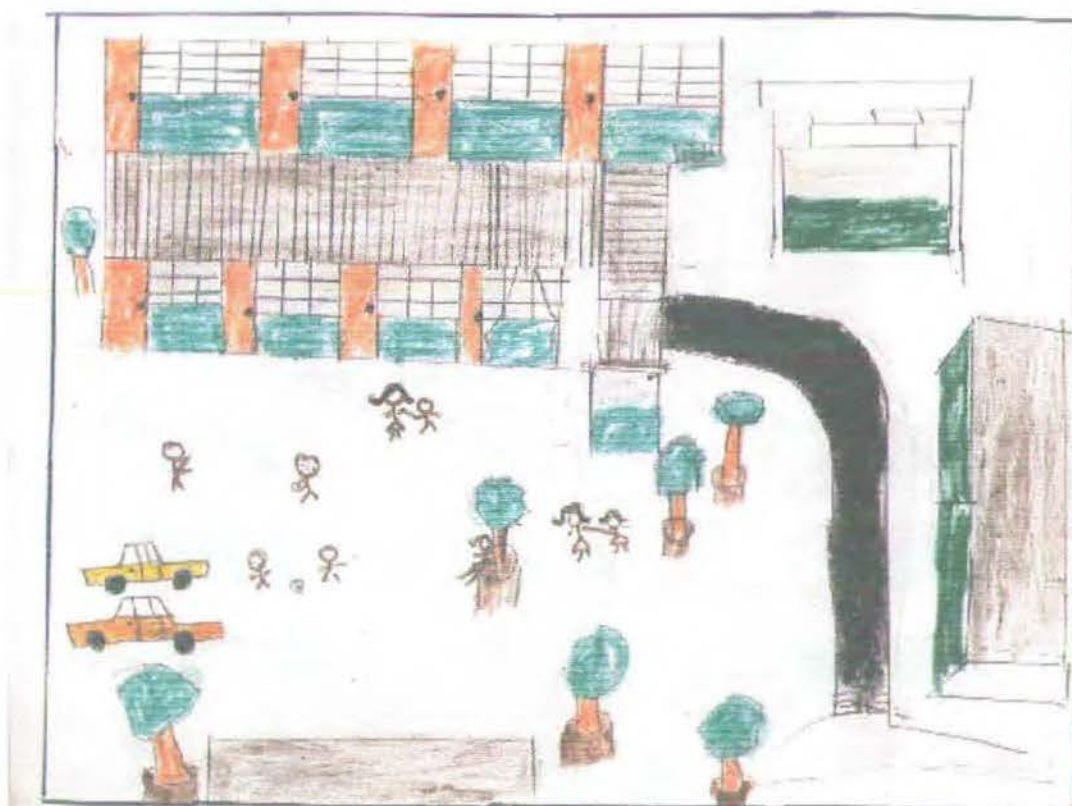


Illustration 3. Terre Bleue School (Drawn by a STD III pupil in Terre Bleue).

In Terre Bleue, classrooms are separated by thin wooden partitions so that every word said and every noise made in one classroom can be heard in the adjacent ones. As in the other school, classroom furniture consists of a teacher's desk and cabinet, pupils' desks and chairs which are somewhat dilapidated. In one class, for example, a big stone replaces the leg of a cabinet. The classroom walls need a coat of paint and on the whole offer very little in terms of visual display. As in Four Hills, pupils' desks face the blackboard and the teacher's desk and classrooms are rather crowded.

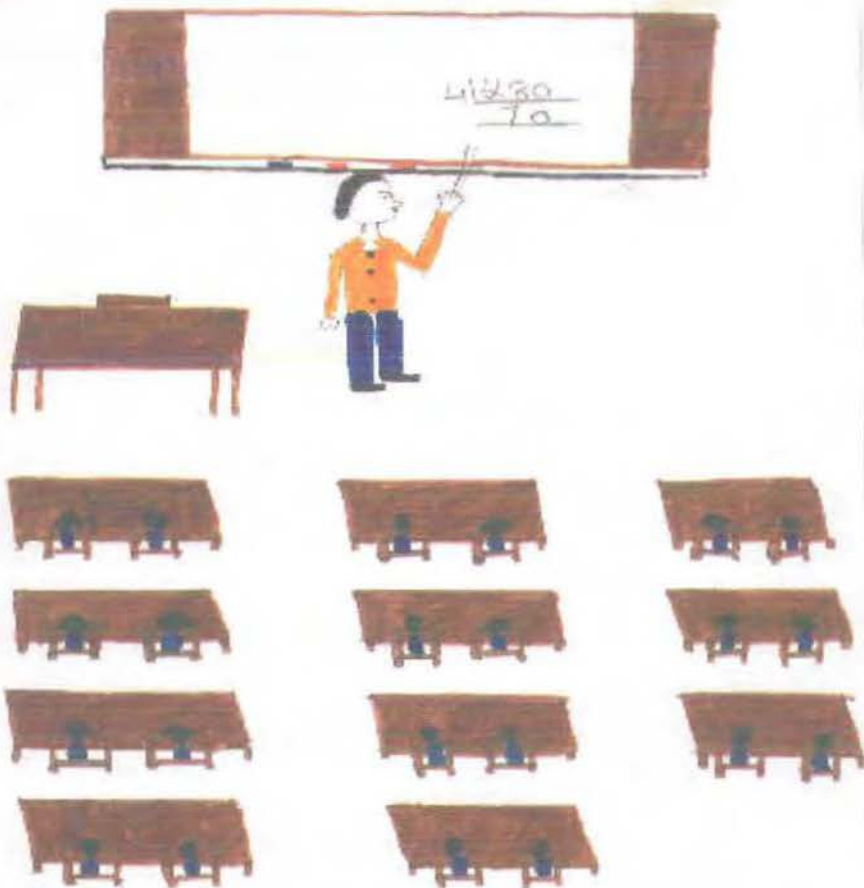


Illustration 4. STD V classroom's arrangement in Terre Bleue (Drawn by a STD V pupil in Terre Bleue).

The school's office is a very small room on the ground floor of the main building and is shared by the HT and the two DHTs. The school does not have a secretary. As in Four Hills, the two desks in the office are covered by a pretty cloth and are uncluttered and occupants in the office do not own a specific desk and space. In addition to the two desks the office is equipped with two metal cabinets. One houses the school supplies. In the other one, a supply of the sweets sold in the school shop are stored. The office has a small louvered, curtained window from which an eye can be kept on the gate and any arrival.

The school has no staff room, so female teachers meet in one classroom at lunch time and male teachers in another one. There is however a room for oriental languages where lessons in three different languages (Urdu, Hindi and Tamil) can be conducted simultaneously with three different groups of pupils. The school's small library is kept locked in the classroom next to the office. As in Four Hills, I was told that there was a TV set but I never saw it, nor could I say where it is kept.

### Getting to school



Illustration 5. Walking to school (Drawn by a STD VI pupil in Terre Bleue).

From 8 a.m. both schools act like magnets, their surrounds bustling with pedestrians, cycles, motorcycles, cars and vans. Many children, most in Terre Bleue, walk to school, the younger ones accompanied by a parent who usually carries the heavy school bag while children carry their own "*tente*". Other children get to school perched on bicycle handle bars and cross bars or on the back-rack of a motorcycle, keeping their legs up so as not to entangle them in the wheel or even by sitting on the motorcyclist's knees. In all cases, school bags and "*tentes*" are ingeniously hooked or tied wherever there is room to do so. Other children, mostly in Four Hills, get car rides before they are dropped at the school gate by parents, relatives or acquaintances on their way to work. For busy and often wealthier parents, private vans are also becoming an increasingly popular solution to getting their children to school. Every school day, for a fee, the children are picked up and dropped outside their home.

Teachers are also dropped at the school gate by relatives and friends. Others either walk, if they live near by, or travel by bus. For example, Christelle, a teacher in standard one of Four Hills, has a thirty minute walk to the school. Most days, on her way, she stops to visit her sick mother. She arrives at school at about nine o'clock. Like many other teachers she tends to be late rather than early. On arrival, like her colleagues, she goes straight to the office where she signs her name in the attendance book and then proceeds to her classroom to drop her bag or to assembly if it has already started.

Rama, a teacher of standard six in Terre Bleue, lives in the Plaines Wilhems district of Mauritius. It takes an hour and a half each way for Rama to get to school. Sometimes, when he is lucky, he manages to get a lift in the car of a friend who occasionally has to travel north for his work. Both Christelle and Rama, as with the majority of teachers in Four Hills and Terre Bleue, cannot afford to possess a car.

Up to 9 a.m., the time at which the bell rings, the school belongs to parents and children. The classrooms have been opened earlier by a school worker<sup>47</sup>. Parents and children circulate freely in and out of them to deposit bags and "*tentes*". As soon as the bell rings children rush to line-up by the office with their class mates.

Assembly is conducted by the HT or a DHT. A prayer is recited, the national anthem is sung with gusto, visitors are welcomed and special happenings are announced.

Although some teachers stand by during assembly they usually do not participate. Their work really starts when children are dismissed from assembly. At such time, teachers and pupils make their way to classrooms in an orderly manner, parents make their way towards the gate and the HT, DHT and secretary make their way to the office.

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<sup>47</sup> In Mauritian primary schools, a school worker's job consists of running errands between the office and classrooms, office, bank and shops. They distribute the milk and bread and they clean classrooms at the end of the day.



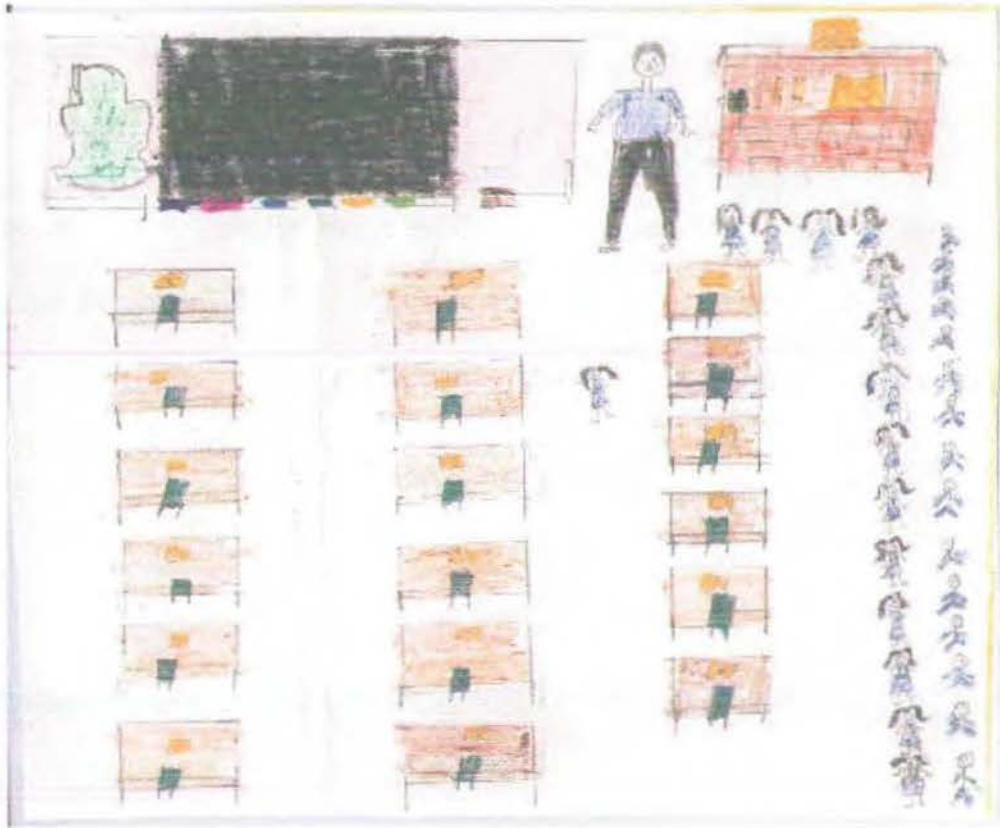


Illustration 6. STD VI pupils entering class (Drawn by STD VI pupil in Terre Bleue).

## Parents in school

When the bell rings, the busy parents have long gone or are still dropping their children while some less-rushed mothers sit on a low wall to watch assembly then make their way home. In both schools, once children are in class, parents seem to have very little business in school. On occasions someone brings lunch or an item forgotten at home by the child. Some other time, parents may need to see the HT, a DHT or the secretary for enrolling a young one. In this case they are received in the office, where they are told what to do and what papers to bring. At lunch time, a small number of mothers do return to the school with cooked meals for their children, but the majority of parents will

not return until three in the afternoon when school finishes.

In lower grades, the fact that some of the parents accompany their children into classrooms gives them some opportunities to meet teachers. This is the case in Christelle's class where she and parents generally talk about children's progress. Parents are also very keen to ask her advice on the kind of books they should buy in order to give extra work to their children.

In upper grades, contact between parents and teachers is somewhat more formal. Working towards success at the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) is of the utmost importance for these parents, especially for those who have children in standard VI. Philip and Lalita whose daughter Annabelle is in standard VI, find it easy to talk about homework and private tuition, but as Philip explained to me, they find it more difficult to talk openly about Annabelle's anticipated achievement at CPE and her general performance at school during the course of her standard VI. They recounted the case of their nephew whose parents and teachers were convinced that he would rank high at CPE examination. All were later proven wrong.

In both lower and upper grades, most parents like Philip and Lalita have limited and often circumspect interactions with teachers. Aboo, an oriental language teacher in Terre Bleue, explains relations between parents and teachers this way:



When you are in a new school, you have parents calling on you, talking about their children and so on. Finally when they have an idea of what kind of person you are, there is no need for them to call on you (OT8).

Once they are secure in the knowledge that their child is in good hands, parents are completely absent from school life and activities. Parents are more likely to come to school when things are not going well, when, for example, they do not agree with the appointment of a certain teacher in an upper grade class, or when they actually want an upper grade teacher removed from a specific class, or when they do not agree with current reforms like subject teaching. In those cases, parents may come to the office to protest individually, or en masse after talking among themselves at the gate. The latter often results in spontaneous sit-ins in the school grounds, which are later reported in the local press.

### **Teachers' routines**

General purpose teachers are assigned a class for a year in which they teach all subjects of the primary school curriculum, except oriental languages, catechism and physical education. Teachers may keep the same group of children for up to three years and many like to do so. A teacher taking Standard I may, for example, continue teaching the same group of children in Standard II the following year and standard III the following one. Specialist teachers, on the other hand, teach oriental languages or catechism to the specific children who take these subjects and do so at all the levels of the primary school. Both Terre Bleue and Four Hills have physical education teachers<sup>48</sup> who teach only the upper levels, standards IV, V and VI.

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<sup>48</sup> In 1996, there were 33 (1 female) physical education teachers for the 281 Mauritian primary schools.

Given these particularities, a day at school will be rather different for teachers in lower grades (STD I, II and III), teachers in upper grades (STD IV, V and VI) and specialist teachers, such as oriental language teachers, catechism and physical education teachers. The following section outlines the major activities and interactions that make the routine of a day at school for these diverse teachers.

### **Teachers in lower grades (Standards I, II and III)**

In both Four Hills and Terre Bleue and in most Mauritian primary schools teachers of lower grades are females. Christelle is a general purpose teacher in a Standard II of Four Hills. She is in her late forties and has twenty-five years teaching experience. Her description of a day at school in many ways typifies that of many other teachers in lower grades and corresponds to observations made during the days I spent in her and in other lower grades classrooms.

Once in the classroom, I have a little chat with my pupils, to see if all is well, if they are in good health, if they have had a good night sleep... Then we speak about kindness, politeness, how one should behave, good manners, because you see its not just the academic side that you have to give these children. You see they are small and what they learn when they are small is going to stay with them for the rest of their life. After doing that, then I start the subjects (T3).

What Christelle means by “subjects” includes English, French, Mathematics and EVS<sup>49</sup>.

These subjects are also what she and other Mauritian teachers mean by the “academic side” of education as opposed, for example, to the creative and physical side of education.

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<sup>49</sup> 'Environmental Studies (EVS) is multi-disciplinary, comprising science and social studies.

The school day's routine in lower grades is very similar within the two schools and what follows is a condensed version of Christelle's teaching day as she recounted it herself:

The first subject is math. I find that I always take a bit too long with math. Then it's the break and we eat. I give enough time to children because some eat fast, others not so fast, others even play as they eat. After that we do English. In that lesson, I introduce new words, for example, to explain the word working I ask children: What are we doing now? What does dad do? What is mum doing at home? For English, unfortunately, I must start with asking questions in French and then slowly move into English, unless we show pictures but otherwise I must speak French to introduce new English words. I do not know if it's good but... that's how I do it. After introducing new words, we read and then we do exercises. I do not give many exercises let's say five small sentences, but we spend a lot of time on writing. I want children to have a good handwriting, one they can keep later on in life. In the afternoon we do French. Like for English we first introduce new words then we read and then the children do exercises. Like for English, we follow what's in the book. Then, at the end of the day we do EVS and that's all, it's 3 p.m. (T3).

Illustration 7. Christelle, teacher in her STD II classroom in Four Hills school (Drawn by one of Christelle's pupil).



Christelle's approach to teaching the subjects is very similar across the levels and schools. It is a three pronged approach consisting of a short explanation to the whole class, some reading aloud by the whole class or sometimes row by row, followed by written exercises. Using French and Creole for introducing English and explaining aspects and concepts of math and EVS is very common practice in Terre Bleue and Four Hills and the other visited primary schools.

Other subjects, such as physical education and art education, are also part of the curriculum in standard II. When I asked Christelle whether she did those subjects as well, she said:

... To tell you the truth, I rarely go on the playing field, it is too dusty and besides, we cannot play because other classes are working. So I sometimes do some little free-standing exercises in the classroom and children are happy. As for creative education, sometimes I do it in the morning if I have time! (T3).

Most of Christelle's colleagues act in similar ways with regards to teaching art and physical education.

In the course of the day, Christelle gets free time on several occasions. Twice a week, most pupils in her class are taught an oriental language or catechism. She vacates her classroom for about three-quarters of an hour because this is where Hindi is taught, and she goes to the staff room. The staff room serves many purposes, one of which is to be the venue for catechism classes. It is also the place where Christelle and all other standard II teachers chat to each other and generally spend time for the duration of oriental languages' classes.

Christelle and teachers (of all grades) also get a break during the lunch hour. During that time, Christelle usually meets a couple of female friends in her or their classrooms, where they eat their "*pain maison*"<sup>50</sup> and have a chat. On rare occasions she stays in her class to do some work. At no time do she or her colleagues have to do yard duty. Christelle's day at school finishes at 3 p.m., at which time she clocks-out by writing her name in the attendance book and walks back home.

### **Teachers in upper grades (Standards IV, V and VI)**

In both Four Hills and Terre Bleue and in most Mauritian primary schools teachers of upper grades are male. In both schools, the very few female teachers found in upper grades either taught CPE repeaters classes or 'lower' streams of Standards IV, V or VI classes. In upper grades, the teacher's routine is somewhat more full than that of the lower grades described earlier. One of the reasons for this is that most teachers of standards IV, V and VI give private tuition in their own classroom, three times a week. Private tuition consists of extra written exercises and in some rare cases extra explanations given by the regular class teacher to the whole class for a fee. This kind of private tuition is given mostly at the end of the school day, at 3 p.m..

It is also common practice for teachers and pupils of upper grades to be in class at around 8 a.m. and get an hour's work done before the bell rings at 9 a.m.. Because of this, teachers and pupils of upper grades rarely come down for morning assembly. They have already been in class for at least an hour and are rather busy. If and when they do come down, they quickly return to their classroom as soon as it finishes. For these

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<sup>50</sup> "*Pain maison*" translating as house bread is a small round bread roll typical of Mauritius. Filled like a sandwich, it is eaten for breakfast and lunch.

teachers and their pupils, the school day has already started. The nine o'clock bell merely marks the start of regular work.

Rama is a teacher of Standard VI at Terre Bleue. He is in his early thirties and has ten years teaching experience. It is his third year in the school and with this specific group of students. He already taught them in Standard IV and V. At this time, he is teaching in Standard VI.

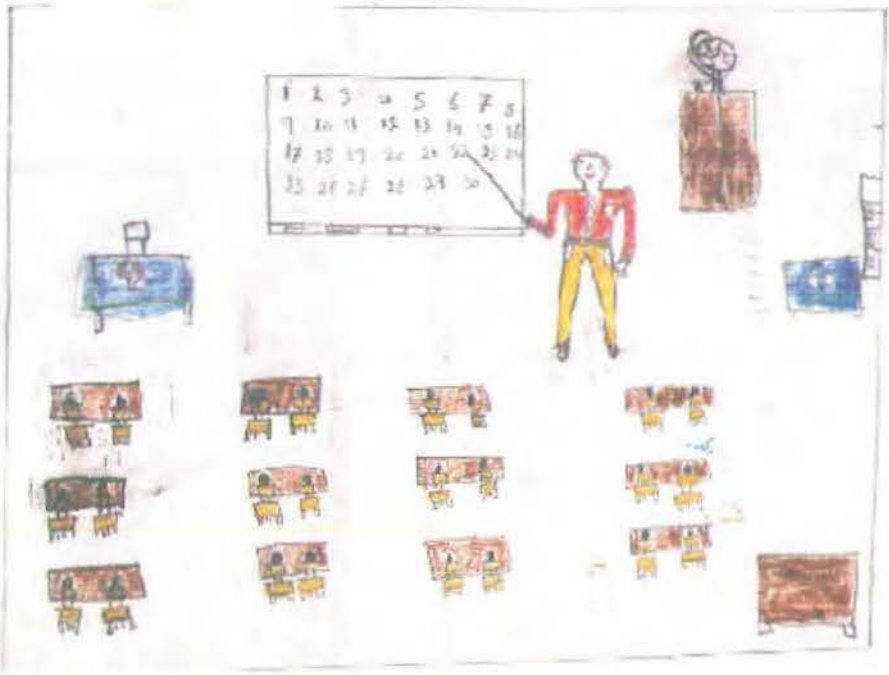


Illustration 8. Rama, STD VI teacher in his classroom in Terre Bleue (Drawn by one of Rama's pupils).

Rama's major task and concern for this year is to prepare his class for the very competitive Certificate of Primary Education Examination (CPE). Routine in upper grades is very similar across the two schools and Rama's day in Standard VI is in that sense a fairly typical example of the routine of an upper-grade teacher's day at school.

What follows has been reconstructed from field notes which were written on and about the day that I spent in Rama's classroom.

**TABLE 21: A TEACHER'S ACTIVITIES ON A GIVEN DAY IN A STANDARD VI CLASS IN TERRE BLEUE**

9.00 - 9.10	Does register - collects forms signed by parents.
9.10 - 9.50	Math: Supervises class correction of homework. Ticks individual exercise books.
9.50 - 10.05	Takes children to school yard and supervises distribution of milk.
10.05 - 10.45	Free time during oriental languages.
10.45 - 11	Left class.
11 - 11.45	Teaches EVS: Reads and explains a chapter in EVS textbook.
11.45 - 12.30	Lunch break.
12.30 - 12.35	EVS (continued, same as above).
12.35 - 14.00	French: General and individual correction of homework - Class reading and text comprehension.
14.00 - 14.30	Break.
14.30 - 14.55	English: Pupils do exercises while teacher ticks homework.
15.00	End of school day.

In all grades, a regular school day lasts six hours. For teachers, however, this does not necessarily mean six hours spent teaching. Taking into account breaks and Oriental language period, Rama's regular teaching time adds up to only three and a half hours for that fairly typical day (Table 21).

A clarification of what is meant by 'regular school day' and 'regular teaching' should be made at this point. In most Mauritian primary schools a regular school day starts at 9 a.m. and finishes at 3 p.m. It is during that time, that teachers from both lower grades and upper grades do their regular or fixed teaching. Regular teaching includes: French, English, EVS and mathematics. In principle, it should also include creative education

Most teachers of upper grades and their pupils are in class by 8 a.m. most mornings of the school week. The reason they give for doing so is that they never have time to finish work during regular hours. This extra hour is customary rather than obligatory and most of the time it is voluntary rather than part of the paid private tuition mentioned earlier.

A sizeable financial advantage that comes with being a teacher in upper grades is that they are allowed to give private tuition to their whole classes in their own classroom. They do so three times a week at 3 p.m. at the end of the regular school hours, and charge a fee to each individual pupil<sup>51</sup>. Teachers in upper grades are also more likely to give private tuition, this time at home, to groups of students from their neighbourhood or even far away if they have a very good reputation.

Because of private and extra tuition, teachers in upper levels have a work-load that is substantially heavier than that of teachers in lower levels. For private tuition, Rama's teaching time expands to eight hours. Additions to his regular teaching load consist of an hour of teaching in the morning, another hour and a half of extra tuition in his own classroom in the afternoon, plus two hours tuition at his residence for private pupils later in the evening.

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<sup>51</sup> The financial rewards that can be obtained from giving private tuition are the 'often unspoken' and 'often given' reason why male teachers insist on teaching in upper grade classes. Most male teachers said that, because female teachers have children and families to look after, they do not have time for private tuition. They also said that female teachers are much better in their dealings with the younger children of lower grades and that pupils in upper grades need the hand of steel that a man can provide. In full contradiction of these statements, the only time female teachers are found in upper grades they teach the "weak streams", where pupils tend to be less compliant and where most teachers said that "a firm hand is needed". Private tuition is seldomly given in those "weak streams".



Marking also contributes to that work-load and takes a lot of teachers' time. Teachers tend to use the free time they get during oriental languages to catch up with their marking. They also tend to mark during break and while pupils are busy filling in pages and pages of exercises which in turn will need to be corrected.

Rama's time in class, just as that of Christelle's, is taken up by the teaching of Mathematics, EVS, French and English. In his teaching, Rama follows steps that are very similar to those used by Christelle. First, he gives a brief explanation on the blackboard, then he asks children to read a text in the textbook aloud (all children have textbooks). Lastly, he gives the children some written exercises. He says that because most of his and his pupils' time is spent preparing for the CPE , he does not have the time to 'indulge' in other activities such as art and physical education. The latter is taught twice a week by a specialist teacher. There are no visible signs in his class or among children's belongings of the former ever being taught.

Rama and his colleagues, just like teachers in Four Hills, are free during the lunch hour and do not perform yard duty. Because Terre Bleue does not have a staff room, even a multi-function one as in Four Hills, teachers gather in a couple of classrooms. Deciding upon who goes where is done according to sex rather than grades. Rama and his male colleagues have lunch in one of their classrooms while female teachers meet for lunch in another one. In both, they eat their lunch, read the newspaper, share their news and generally gossip.

Rama leaves school at 3 p.m. on the days he does not give extra tuition in his classroom

and at around 5 p.m., 5.30 p.m. on those days he does. Usually, he has found a way of doing all his marking during the day and does not need to bring school-work home.

### Teachers of oriental languages

Teachers of Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Mandarin, Gujarati or Urdu, are not assigned a particular class or classroom. A teacher of Tamil, for example, will teach Tamil, across the grades to those Tamil and non-Tamil (very rare) children wishing to learn that language. Teachers of other oriental languages do the same. For Yousouf, a teacher of Urdu at Four Hills, work starts after assembly:

We call at school at 9 a.m., I usually come late as I told you<sup>52</sup>. We have to wait for our period to start and we start working with the different classes, different groups. The problem at school is that we do not have a particular classroom for ourselves. We have to work here and there throughout the whole day and when the weather is fine, it's okay, but when it rains it is very bad, and you see this I don't appreciate! On top of it all, in some schools, not in this one, in some schools you have teachers teaching two different languages in one particular class. Two languages taught in the same classroom you can imagine what does it make! (OT4).

In both Four Hills and Terre Bleue, the majority of teachers of oriental languages do not have their own classroom and this contrasts with general purpose teachers who are assigned a classroom for the whole year. In both schools there is an oriental language classroom. It is a very small room in Four Hills and a larger partitioned room in Terre Bleue.

For oriental language teachers, just as for general purpose teachers, a 'regular' day at

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<sup>52</sup> Yousouf has an import business which he conducts in the morning before school and in the afternoons after school.

school lasts six hours. Teachers arrive at school at 9 a.m. and leave at 3 p.m.. Teachers of oriental languages do not give private tuition in the school as their colleagues of upper grades do and their teaching load varies:

Normally we have to teach six periods [45 minutes each]. When I started we had to teach eight periods. It was difficult to teach eight periods! Now we teach six periods. Now there is direct teaching, three periods direct teaching. So I teach in three classes and I help in three others. I help my colleagues, correct the copy book, see after the students when there is reading and ask some questions (OT4).

The forty-five minute periods are organised in such a way that, for example, all Standard I pupils are taught oriental language at the same time for that specific period. Then it is the turn of another Standard. During the periods in which teachers are not doing 'direct teaching', they have to remain in class and assist other teachers.

In both schools, oriental languages' teachers keep to themselves and rarely mix with general purpose teachers. During breaks and the lunch hour, oriental teachers make for the oriental language classroom where they spend time socialising with other oriental language teachers.

### **Other teachers**

#### **Physical education teachers**

Both Four Hills and Terre Bleue schools have a physical education teacher. These teachers work in more than one school. John is the physical education teacher in Four Hills. He is in his mid-forties and has twenty years experience as a general purpose

teacher. He is one of the thirty-three, mostly ex-general purpose teachers, who recently retrained as physical education teachers. It is his second year in the school and there was no physical education teacher in the school before him. He works with pupils from Standards IV, V, and VI and on rare occasions with lower grades where he assists teachers. He lives close by and likes to come to school early. His arrival is usually very much noticed:

All the time when I arrive at school in the morning, children come to me and say: 'Monsieur, Monsieur, take our class! take our class again!' But I can't take the same class over and over again! My timetable is fixed for the day, I must stick to the timetable! (T10).

Like all other teachers, John has to sign his time of arrival in the book. He leaves his personal belongings on a table in what serves as a staff room and usually stands by pupils during assembly, joining in the singing of the national anthem. His place of work is a grassy field, called "*la plaine* (the plain)", the size of a soccer field which is dusty in summer and muddy in winter. John's colleague in Terre Bleue works in similar conditions with the difference being that there is no playing field in that school, so physical education is taught in the school yard. In both schools, sport materials comprising some balls and flags are kept in cupboards wherever there is room to do so and are taken out when needed. Both John and his colleague prepare their work thoroughly. John made a point of telling me so when I asked him about his day routine.

My work has been prepared long ago, since December, I have prepared all globally [for the year]. Then I have a term plan, a weekly plan, a day plan. So what I do today was prepared maybe a week ago. I have every thing at my fingertips. I have no problems, materials are ready, my notes are ready, I know my subject in detail and work can begin (T10).

John's work is organised according to the objectives he has fixed for the class in advance. At the time, his objective was to have a 'presentable' football team by the end of March. According to John, in order to achieve this objective, children must acquire certain skills such as being able to pass the ball. With this as his "minor" objective, John organises a lesson in the following manner:

First I do a warm up. Then I do some little games leading children to understanding a pass. You see maybe next week we'll learn the pass proper but this week I introduce some little games to go towards it. Then we do a proper game. In that game we find the skill I have been teaching them, we use what we have learnt earlier (T10).

Both John and his colleague in Terre Bleue share their time between several schools. In each school, they teach forty-five minute lessons to Standards IV, V and VI. Sometimes they give a hand when other teachers are absent. They stay in the school when they have a free period. John, for example, uses this as an opportunity to read books about teaching sports to young children.

John and his colleague at Terre Bleue mix with everyone in school and enjoy a very

good relationship with other teachers. They are also very popular with their pupils. The day following John's absence, the pupils in Four Hills told him that they do not like him missing class. According to John, what makes him popular with teachers and pupils alike is the fact that his lessons break the monotony of as he puts it:

Study, study, study and nothing else, children are fed up and see sport as a relaxation, a way to get out of the class into the fresh air. Then when pupils return to class they are more relaxed, happier ! (T10).

Both John and his colleague at Terre Bleue enjoy a good relationship with parents. Some parents come to talk to John in the morning because, they want his advice in terms of exposing their children to further sporting activities.

### **Religious education teacher**

Four Hills has also Renée, a religious education teacher, who teaches catechism to the Catholic children one day a week. These children usually do not learn an Oriental language and are taught catechism instead. On days when she is not in Four Hills, Renée does the same in other schools. She is much less visible than her colleagues the physical education teachers. She teaches in the 'staff room' in the presence of all the other people spending 'waiting time' in that room. Sometimes when the weather is fine she takes the children to sit on benches in a semi-covered area of the playground.

The religious education teacher does not belong to any of the previous categories of teachers such as general purpose teachers or oriental language teachers. Like John,

Renée is alone in the type of work she does but she does not enjoy the popularity that he does. In Four Hills, her impact is also greatly reduced due to the fact that she teaches catechism to a limited number of children. For all these reasons, her comings and goings are often un-noticed. She greets and is greeted by other teachers and quietly teaches her subject. There is no need for her to meet the parents of her pupils in the school. She knows them well and has opportunities to see many of them at church on Sundays.

### Trainee teachers

Teacher training lasts two years. Half of that time is spent following courses at the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), the other half is spent gaining experience in schools. There are two young trainees in Four Hills and none in Terre Bleue. When Trishula, a trainee teacher at Four Hills, describes her day, she distinguishes between what she is supposed to do and what she actually does:

I have been in the school for six weeks already! Every day, when I arrive at school, I go to the office and sign my presence in the book. Then I am supposed to be in Standard IV, I am supposed to sit down in the class and observe the teacher work: how she conducts class, how she does the various chapters [of the textbook], because you see in the book it's one way but the way she does it, it's not the same! She uses methods for explaining things to children, those who do not understand and I must watch. I am also supposed to teach two subjects per day, which I can choose with the '*prof*'<sup>53</sup>. All this should be useful experience for when I start work. At the beginning of the six weeks, we [Trishula and the two other teacher trainees] were doing all this but we stopped because we feel we disturb the class. You see, often we are sitting at the back of class watching the teacher at work and then five or six times during the day we are asked to get out to give a hand in the office, or to replace a teacher going somewhere. Well this is a distraction for the teacher we are watching, he does not say anything but we can see, sometimes we are in the middle of important work and we have to disrupt everyone! So now we stay in the staff room<sup>54</sup>. We wait there and we replace absent teachers when necessary. We also do some office work, at the beginning of

<sup>53</sup> Mauritian teachers, male and female are indirectly referred to as *prof* which is short for *professeur*. Directly, female teachers are called "Miss" and male teachers "*Monsieur*".

<sup>54</sup> The multi-purpose staff-room where they chat with whoever happens to be there: Catechism teacher, physical education teacher, general purpose teachers on free time during oriental language period.

the year, there is a lot to do: copy lists of new children who are in Standard I, copy lists of children for visits to the dentist, things like that! (TT1).

As Trishula said earlier, teacher trainees are supposed to gain teaching experience during their stay in school. Her story indicates that it not the case in Four Hills. In that school, Trainee Teachers seem to be doing what apprentices are often complaining about doing in many other sectors of work and that is that they do what other people do not want to do. Talks with teacher trainers, however, reveal that these practices, to their knowledge, although not uncommon, are not prevalent in Mauritian primary schools.

In Four Hills Trishula and her female colleagues get on well with other female teachers. Because they spend time talking with them regularly in the staff room, their relationship is one of friendship. Because of this friendship, Trishula says that staff did not exclude them from the activities during sports day. On that occasion Trishula with the help of another teacher and a parent, was given the role of announcing events and results with a loud speaker. She says: "It's the first time I did this and I really liked it!" However, relations with parents are not always so friendly. Trishula recounts an incident that happened at the beginning of the year.

The first day we arrived at school, we [three teacher trainees] were put in a class to replace an absent teacher. You could say it was a bad start, this should not have happened! We did that for two days. We asked children to call us by our first name, and soon we could not control the class any more. You see children were used to be hit by teachers when they misbehaved. We did not hit them, we learnt that we should not hit children. But children are used to strict discipline, they started shouting, they were not listening. We did not know anything about the life of the school. Parents started to complain about us . . . One afternoon we sang with the children the next day parents came to the school and said: "*Ca banne*



*professeur-la, ziste pou faire chanter dans l'école!* (These teachers are in school just to sing!)" (TT1).

That day Trishula and her friends did not want to go back to the class, even when the HT insisted that they should. The absent teacher came back and they did not have to go back.

On the whole Trishula and her colleagues are very much part of the school. They are in the school every day, are fairly visible because they run errands and also because they spend time in the 'staff room' either talking or doing office work (they never sit in the office to do office work). Having experienced some difficulties in the first weeks of their time in school, they have adjusted their routine to that of other people and are now spending their day quietly, making themselves useful doing everything but teaching practice.

## **People in the office**

The role, as well as the number, of people to be found in offices of Mauritian primary schools varies according to the size of school. The secretary in Four Hills explains the situation this way: "Many small schools do not have a secretary. The Head Teacher does the [administrative] work with the help of Deputy Head Teachers or even teachers. In some schools there are no assistants so the HT does the work with the secretary".

In Terre Bleue, there is no secretary but there are one Head Teacher and two Deputy Head Teachers. All are male. In Four Hills, there is one HT, a secretary and about six DHTs. All share the office except two DHT who are female, one of whom has charge of

a class and the other one spends time in classrooms replacing absent teachers.

In Terre Bleue, one of the DHTs usually arrives a little before 8 a.m. and opens the office. He takes out the book in which teachers have to sign their arrival, plugs in the telephone and generally answers queries from parents, teachers and pupils. At 9 a.m. he or, on rare occasions, the HT rings the bell and conducts assembly.

The conducting of assembly consists of greeting children and of passing on special messages to them. During assembly specific instructions are given, for example, those relating to visits to the dentist or doctor, special events like sports day, independence celebrations or cultural events are mentioned and commented upon. Extraordinary events such as the death of Mauritian prominent people (ie: that of Gaetan Duval a flamboyant and very much liked politician) or the arrival of a cyclone are also mentioned during assembly.

On the whole, assembly is short, children sing the national anthem and a pupil from an upper grade conducts prayer. Then the DHT wishes children a good day: "*Ok les enfants passez une bonne journée* (Ok children have a good day!)", to which children answer in a singing chorus: "*Merci Monsieur et vous de même!* (Thank you Sir and the same to you!)". Once children have made their way to the classrooms the HT and DHTs go back to the office where they receive parents, or visitors, and go about their administrative and other tasks. They leave on the dot at 3 p.m.



Illustration 9. Assembly in Terre Bleue. Children getting in line to follow teachers to classrooms (Drawn by a STD VI pupil).

In Four Hills, "*le maître*"<sup>55</sup> defines his activities as follows:

During a day at school, I must see that my school clerk does his work, I must see that teachers do their work as well. I have to see the cleanliness of the school, of the yard. I am responsible for the whole school and its campus... I have to visit the teachers, see them at work, sign the daily notes<sup>56</sup>. I have to supervise the trainee teachers also (T11).

<sup>55</sup> "*Maître*" translates as Master. In Mauritian primary schools, all male Head Teachers are called "*maître*".

<sup>56</sup> "Daily notes" are the daily teaching preparation notes written by all teachers which the HT (or a DHT in his/her absence) has to check and sign. In both schools, the signing was done very quickly. I never witnessed the HT or DHTs reading these notes.

The language used by the HT shows clearly that he sees his activities in terms of responsibilities: "I must", "I have to", "I am responsible", "supervise". In Four Hills (as in most primary schools) the Head Teacher is in charge and responsibilities such as those listed above are delegated to a DHT when the HT is absent.

During the course of the day, the people in the office perform certain tasks. Who does what task varies according to personality and the specific circumstances of the school. Table 22 gives an indication of the tasks that are usually accomplished in the office. In Terre Bleue, these tasks are performed by a DHT with occasional help from the other DHT and the HT. In Four Hills, these tasks are performed by the clerk/secretary with occasional help from the others.

**TABLE 22: ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER TASKS PERFORMED IN THE OFFICES OF TERRE BLEUE AND FOUR HILLS**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document filing and safekeeping.</li> <li>• Managing teaching materials store (ordering from ministry and lending or giving items to teachers).</li> <li>• Book keeping: teachers and pupils absence records, classroom statistics.</li> <li>• Communication with Ministry (school statistics, yearly reports on teachers, examination papers, various paperwork related to teachers travelling expenses, bread and milk<sup>57</sup> (and sometimes cheese) expenses.</li> <li>• Supervising of helpers' work (circulating messages, preparation of milk, counting and dispatching of bread).</li> <li>• Ordering of bread from baker.</li> <li>• Answering the phone and taking messages.</li> <li>• Receiving visitors: inspector and parents (for new enrolments, inquiries and complaints) .</li> <li>• Looking after first aid.</li> </ul>
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<sup>57</sup> Each day children are given a freshly baked "*pain maison*", a glass of milk and sometimes a piece of soft cheese. During break children come to a big container usually placed by the office to fill their cup with that milk. The bread is dispatched to classrooms in large baskets by school workers. It is eaten during the morning break. Milk and bread are supplied to schools free by the Mauritian government.

In principle, DHTs (except those who have a specific administrative brief) must spend most of their time in classrooms. This, however, does not happen in both Four Hills and Terre Bleue. In Terre Bleue, one of the DHTs spends his day doing the activities listed above; the other DHT spends most of his time handling the affairs of the school shop. This shop, originally the school canteen, has turned into a sweet shop over time.

During the day, the DHT keeps records of sales, keeps accounts and goes out to buy fresh supplies. During each break he sets up shop on a folding table and puts everything away at the end of each break. In Four Hills, some DHT help in the office while others spend time outside the office talking to each other. In general, apart from the two female DHTs in Four Hills, DHTs of both Four Hills and Terre Bleue rarely spend time in classrooms.

Status plays an important role in relation to who does what and even who does something. When the secretary in Four Hills was asked, should he have a magic wand, what he would change at work (excluding salary) he said:

I would change the amount of work I have to do because it's too much! You see the work of the secretary, of the *maître* and of assistants [DHT] it's very similar. Of course the *maître* is the boss. He controls everything. The assistants come just after the *maître* and they are much 'higher' than the secretary. So, usually, work lands on the secretary's shoulders. When there is work to be done and the big chiefs are there, the secretary is small. The HT and the DHT they write pretty notes but it's the secretary who does the work. At the inspectorate and official places they think they know but what they know it's all on paper. They think that chiefs do all the work in the school and that the secretary does nothing! (T12B).

A DHT compared the people in the office to a family in which “some members have more experience than others, some act in the shadow of others and during fights the youngest usually lose”. On the surface, rapport among the various occupants of the office and with the teachers and visitors is gracious. Most people are in no hurry (except the secretary in Four Hills and the DHT in Terre Bleue who seem to be moving at a faster pace than anyone else). People joke with each other and are very polite.

### **Pupils’ routines**



Illustration 10. Pupils in Terre Bleue primary school. (Drawn by a STD II pupil of that school).

The following section outlines the major activities and interactions that make the routine of a day at school for pupils. Like teachers, pupils’ routine is very different depending which grades they are in.

### Pupils in upper-grades

In both Four Hills and Terre Bleue schools I asked some pupils of upper grades to write a story recounting their activities during an ordinary day at school. Damien is ten years old, a pupil of standard 5A<sup>58</sup> in Four Hills. The following is a translation of the story he wrote in French about his day at school. Damien's story typifies both the sequence and content of activities of an ordinary day in an upper grade class, in both schools. It also corresponds to observations made during my stay in upper grade classes, in both schools.

#### A day at school

Today is Monday. On my way to school, I was thinking of something and I bumped into a man. When I arrived in class, Monsieur<sup>59</sup> was already in. He made us write some EVS notes and it was very long. Then we did mathematics, for some other children it's [math] a nightmare. Mathematics were very difficult so Siddique did them wrong. Monsieur made us laugh a bit even a lot. He gave us a break and we ate. Then it was time for oriental language (Telegu, Hindi, Tamil, Catechism [sic]) Me and Gopol we played in the school yard and we said hello to Miss. Then we read our EVS notes for a while. When oriental language was finished, we went back to class to do English and French. When the midday bell rang we played and went back to class when it rang again. We continued work in French and English. *Monsieur* gave us homework.

Some time later, *Monsieur* made us laugh, he gave us a break and we started our exercises again. Then he gave us permission to put our books and exercise books away. When the p.m. bell rang we played because it was Monday, a lesson day. Then at 3.30 p.m. we went back into class. *Monsieur* gave us exercises in English to do because he had to go and talk to *Monsieur X* about something important. When we finished [our exercises] we exchanged with class mates behind to be corrected. I made two mistakes and Paul made two as well. Then we did French and it was easy. When class finished we went back home quietly to wait for tomorrow" (J/ST7).

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<sup>58</sup> In principle, the different streams for each standard are given colour names. In practice however these colour names are rarely used. When they talk about the various streams, parents, teachers and pupils usually talk in terms of A as being the best and so on.

<sup>59</sup> In Mauritian Primary Schools male teachers are called *Monsieur* (Sir) and female teachers are called *Miss*.

**TABLE 23: PUPIL ROUTINE ON A GIVEN SCHOOL DAY IN A STANDARD V CLASS IN FOUR HILLS**

<p><u>8.00 – 9.00</u> (1 hour)</p> <p><b>EVS notes</b> : <i>Extra work</i> in classroom with teacher</p> <p>Activities: Copying notes from the blackboard into home-work book.</p> <p>Personal comments: <b>It was very long</b></p>
<p><u>9.00 - 10.00</u> (1 hour)</p> <p><b>Mathematics</b>: <i>Time-tabled work</i>.</p> <p>Activities: Copying and working-out of exercises from text-book to exercise book and collective marking.</p> <p>Personal comments: <b>Mathematics were very difficult. For some other children it's a nightmare.</b></p>
<p><u>10.00 - 10.15</u> (15 mins)</p> <p><b>Break</b></p> <p>Activities: Sitting in class eating, chatting with friends, visit to toilets.</p>
<p><u>10.15 - 11.00</u> (45 mins)</p> <p><b>Played, said Hello to Madame ...., read our EVS notes</b> <i>Free-time</i> during Oriental Language.</p>
<p><u>11.00 - 12.00</u> (1 hour)</p> <p><b>English and French</b>: <i>Time-tabled work</i></p> <p>Activities: Listening to teacher explanations, copying and working out of exercises from textbook to exercise book, collective checking.</p>
<p><u>12.00 - 12.45</u> (45 mins)</p> <p><b>We played</b>: Lunch break</p>
<p><u>12.45 - 3.00</u> (2 hours 15 mins)</p> <p><b>Continued work in French and English</b>. <i>Timetabled work</i>.</p> <p>Activities: Listening to teacher explanations, copying and working out of exercises.</p>
<p><u>3.00- 3.30</u> (30 mins)</p> <p><b>We played</b> : Half hour recess before private tuition.</p>
<p><u>3.30 - 4.30</u> (1 hour)</p> <p><b>English exercises and French</b>: <i>Private tuition</i></p> <p>Activities: Copying and working out of exercises from text-book unto private tuition book.</p> <p>Personal comments: <b>I made two mistakes [in English] .... French was easy.</b></p>

\* Words in bold are words used by Damien in his story .

\* Words in italic indicate the nature and duration of work in which Damien is involved in during that day.



Table 23 shows that on that specific day, a fairly typical day for pupils of upper grades in both schools, Damien spent eight and a half hours in school during which he worked six hours and fifteen minutes and was free or was having a break for two hours and fifteen minutes. In both schools, time spent on school work is, however, not restricted to time spent in school alone. Every night, Damien and his upper grade friends have large amounts of homework to do. Many evenings they also have to go to yet more private tuition.

For Damien and his friends, work consists of listening to teachers' explanations, copying, working out, checking and marking of exercises. These activities are practised in both schools and school work is understood in terms of subjects: Math, English, French and EVS.

In most stories, the repetitive usage of the word *travailler* (to work) gives a clear indication of the nature of the activities pupils get to do while being in school. In his story, Damien makes several personal comments about his work, saying that it is very "long", "difficult" or "easy", right or wrong. Most children write about being tired after a hard day at school. One of Damien's school friend even says: "Whoa! What a day for a Monday!"

In his story, Damien mentions playing with his friend at recess and during his free time. However, class arrangement and the nature of activities required of pupils make it so that children have very little interaction among each other inside classrooms. In

Damien's story, the only mention made about (permitted) interactions among pupils in the classroom concerns the exchange of exercise books for marking. In his and other children's stories, what is described in terms of interaction and rapport is usually the two way happening between the teacher and pupils: teachers telling pupils what to do, disciplining and entertaining pupils. In the following drawing, for example, pupils are seen working in their books, while one of them works at the board and the teacher looks on.

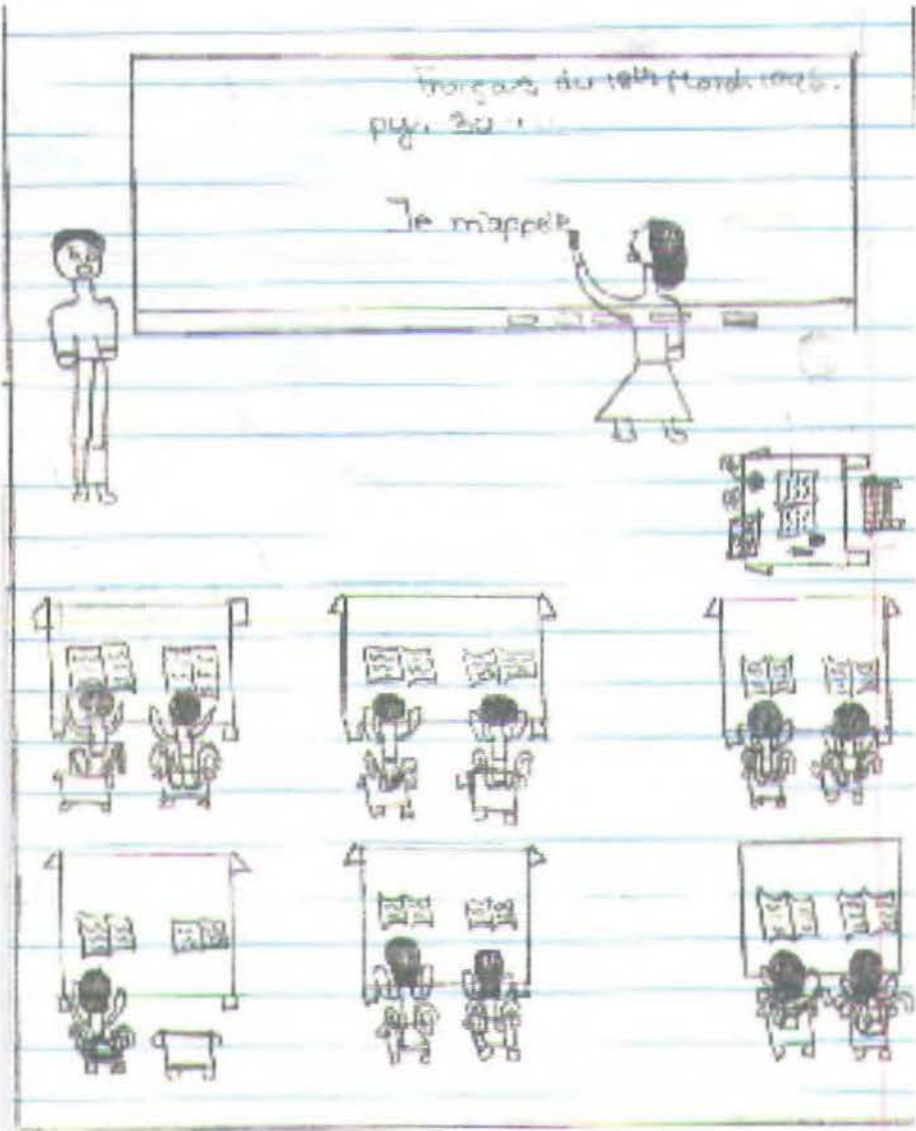


Illustration 11. Pupils at work in a STD VI classroom in Four Hills (Drawn by a pupil of that class).

### Pupils in lower-grades

In both Four Hills and Terre Bleue I asked some children of lower grades to draw a strip cartoon depicting their activities during a day at school. Mila is six years old, a Standard II pupil in Four Hills. The following is a depiction of her day at school. The information Mila gives in her drawing typifies the way a day is spent, this time in lower grades. It also corresponds to my own observations of how ordinary days are spent at school in lower grades and in both schools.

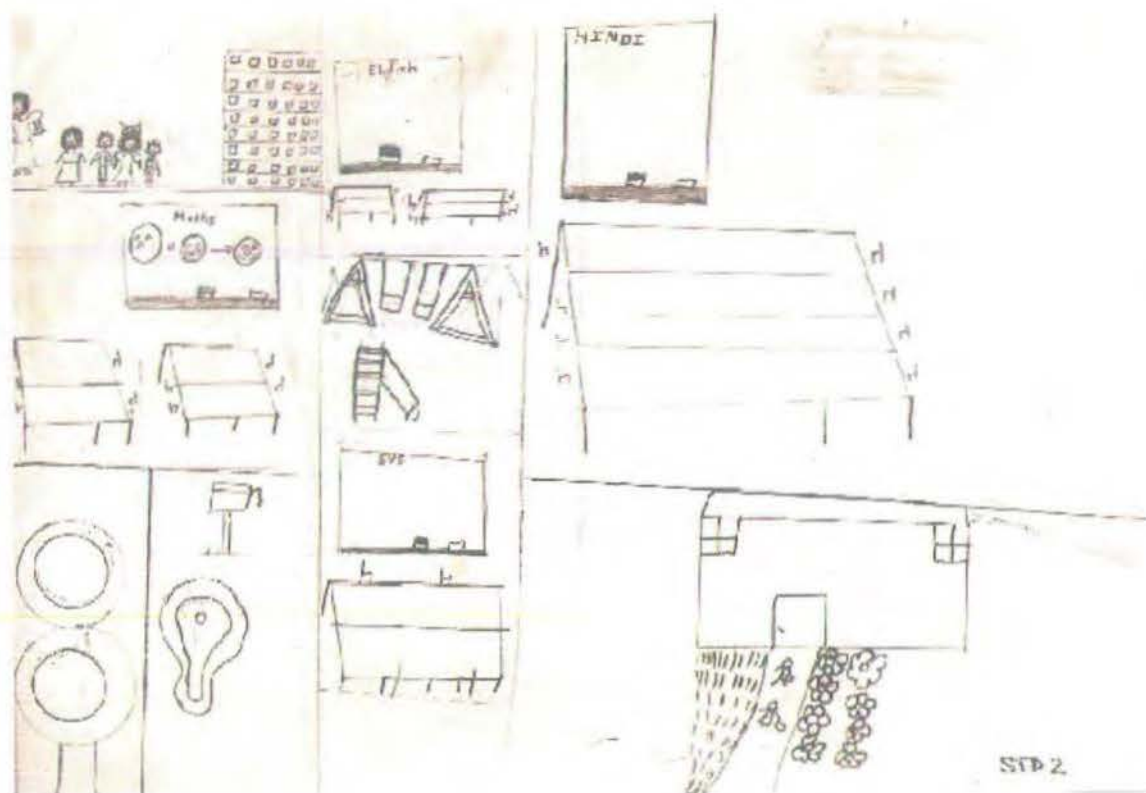


Illustration 12. Strip Cartoon of a day at school in a STD II class in Four Hills (Drawn by Mila, pupil in that class).

When Mila gave me her strip cartoon I asked some clarifications, they (and my own observations) serve to explain each situation as follows.

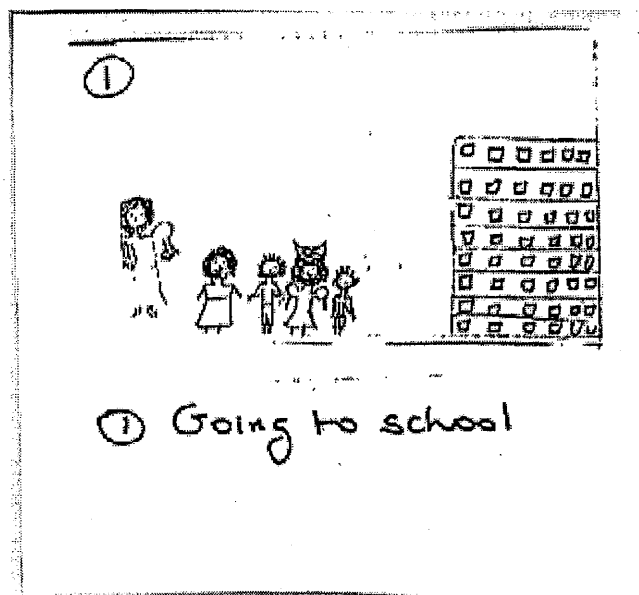


Illustration 13. Going to school. In this drawing Mila (with the bow) is seen walking to school with her mother two brothers and a friend.

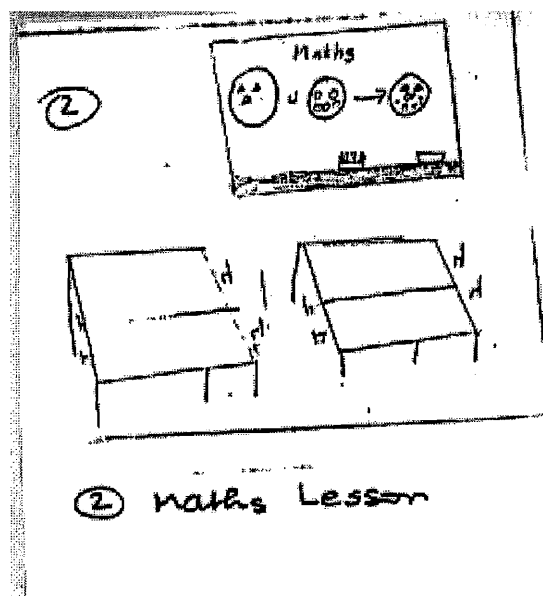


Illustration 14. Math lesson. Mila's drawing shows a classroom situation which consists of a blackboard on which math symbols are written. Some tables and chairs are also drawn.

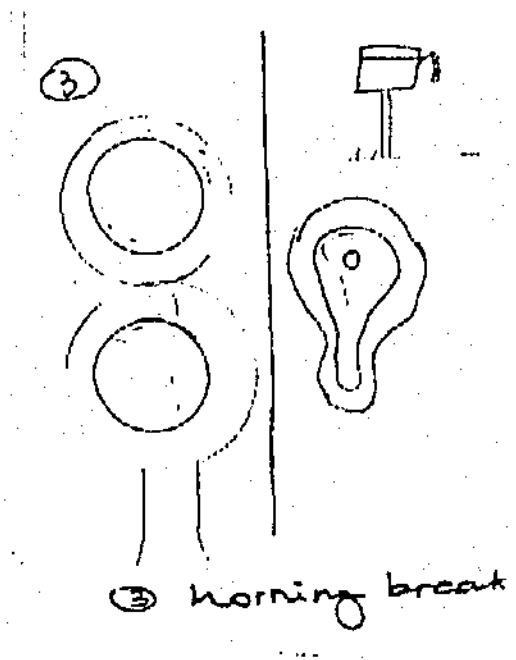


Illustration 15. Morning break. This drawing shows a toilet and a toilet flush. During morning break children of all grades go to the toilets and then return to class to sit quietly and eat their "*pain maison*".

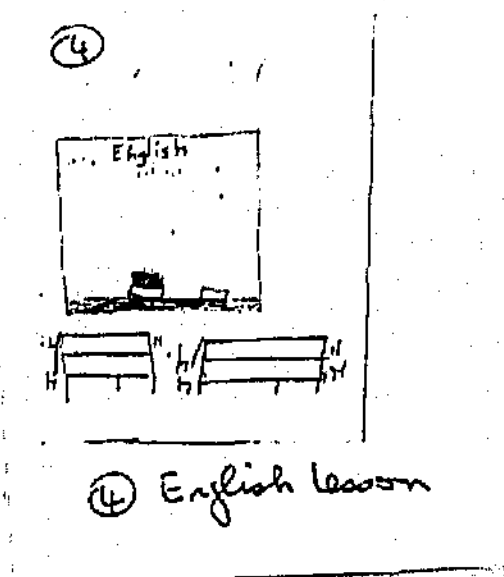
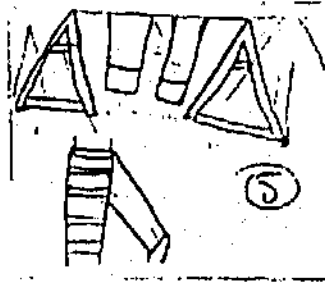
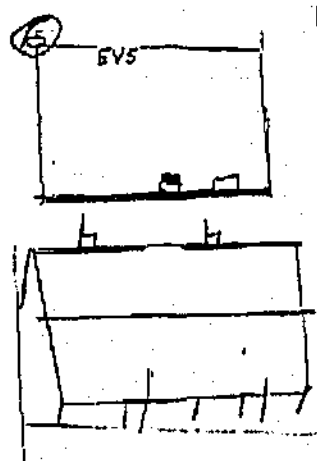


Illustration 16. English lesson. Mila's drawing shows a situation that is very similar to drawing 2, a classroom situation with a blackboard on which English is written, few tables and chairs.



⑤ lunch break

Illustration 17. Lunch break. The drawing shows swings and slides. Having eaten during the morning break most children spend the lunch hour playing in the playground.



⑥ EVS lesson

Illustration 18. EVS lesson. A similar representation as for Math and English, this time EVS.

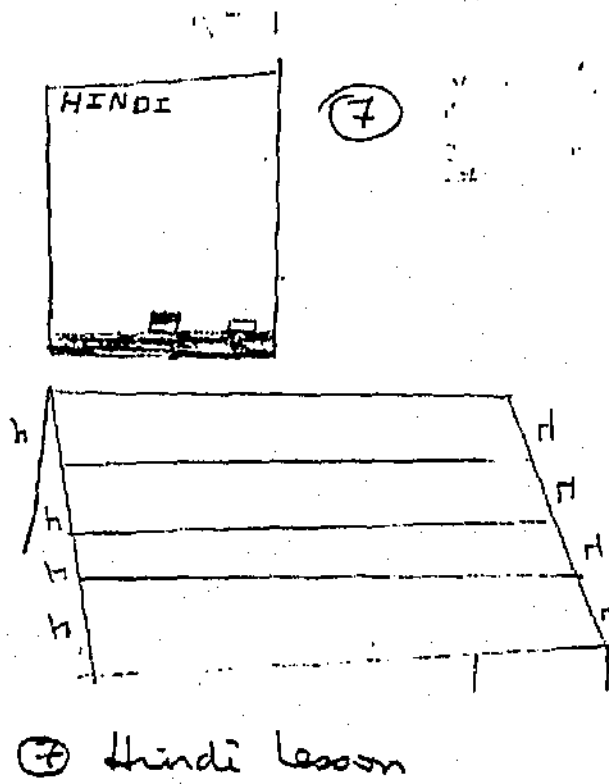


Illustration 19. Hindi lesson. Similar representation as for Math, English, and EVS. Mila said that Hindi is her favourite subject.

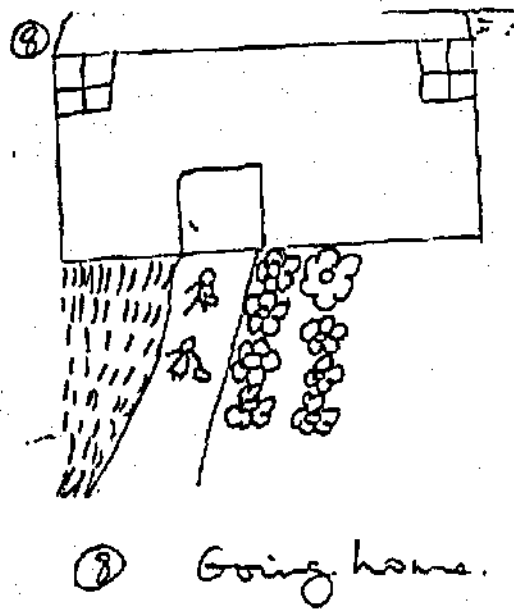


Illustration 20. Going Home. Mila and one brother are seen going up the path to the house set in a garden with a lawn and pretty flowers.

For Mila, and most other children who drew a strip cartoon of their day at school, school is a succession of things to do and class is the blackboard where anything of significance happens. This view also corresponds to the representations of classroom activities shown earlier in this chapter displaying similar convergence towards the blackboard. In lower grades, the subjects taught are similar to those taught in upper grades. They are: Math, English, EVS and French (forgotten by Mila) plus an oriental language, Hindi in this case. Other things to do include walking to and back from school, playing and going to the toilet. Other children's drawings quite often also display yard taps which children go to and use to wash their hands and get a drink of water.

In her account of activities during a day at school, Mila does not include people (except when she is outside school) and seems to interact with the blackboard rather than with people in the classroom. Her depiction of a day at school thus becomes a caricature of the paucity of interactions between pupils which has been evident in most of the drawings presented so far. Because of its symbolic nature, Mila's drawing is also not true to reality in its depiction of furniture disposition. In Mila's classroom, as in all other classrooms, pupils' desks face the board and are neatly arranged in rows. When in class, Mila does her work seated at her desk.

A comparison of Mila's routine to that of a pupil in an upper-grade shows that a day at school is organised along very similar lines for both upper and lower graders. For Mila, just as it was for Damien, the day is a succession of subjects, math, English, EVS, Oriental language and French (forgotten in Mila's drawing). Mila and all pupils in lower grades are at school between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. They spend four and a half hours in



class, sitting at their desks and taking breaks for the remaining one and a half hour. There are, however, some differences. For example, Mila and her friends in lower grades do not come early to school and do not stay behind three times a week for extra tuition as the upper graders do. They also seem to have more time to play both in and outside school.

For Mila and many of her friends in lower grades play during breaks seems very pleasurable. They play as soon as they arrive in school in the morning and after having deposited their school bags and "*tentes*". They also play during the lunch break. It has often been said that one of the reasons why lunch is eaten at 10 a.m. rather than noon is because children would forget to eat their lunch and play (the other being that an early lunch compensates for no breakfast). They play with skipping ropes, they play hide and seek, and sometimes soccer. Children of upper grades play similar games but seem to play much less or even not at all, preferring to stay in class. All children play unsupervised as teachers do not do yard duty, yet bullying and accidents are rare (in comparison to schools in some other countries).

### **Special happenings**

The routine of the school is on some occasions broken by special happenings such as sports day, the yearly excursion, absence of some teachers and children because of a religious celebration, a special visit by a mobile theatre and the more regular visits by the inspector. The following section describes in detail, the cross-country race in Terre Bleue. The other events are described more succinctly as they will be considered in further chapters. I was present during the following events and data comes from

observation notes made on those days.

### The 'cross country' race

The DHT in Terre Bleue made the announcement during assembly: "*Aujourd'hui c'est le jour J! Le jour du cross pour les 4èmes 5èmes et 6èmes!* (Today is D-day! Cross country day for STD IV, V and VI!)". In those grades during the past few weeks, physical education had consisted of preparing for that event and a few pupils, among them Shamlesh, are waiting impatiently. Shamlesh, ten years old and a pupil in STD VI A, nearly did not 'make it'. It is only this morning that his parents gave their consent for him to participate in the cross-country. Although he won last year when he was in STD V, this year his parents were reluctant for him to participate. The reason they gave was that, this year with the CPE (Shamlesh is working towards ranking), Shamlesh should not waste his time preparing and running in the cross-country race. In the past few weeks while others were preparing for the cross-country Shamlesh did some revisions for his examination, taking place in six months time. It is only because *Monsieur* took the trouble to explain to Shamlesh's uncle, who himself explained it to his parents, that taking part would not be that bad for his chances at CPE that eventually Shamlesh's parents gave in. Shamlesh is very grateful to *Monsieur* for doing so.

A circuit was decided upon along the village road. The traffic was not stopped, but a couple of police officers were on hand to intervene if necessary. Lower-grade pupils remained in the school yard. The runners from the upper-grades leave school walking with their teachers and make their way to the various departure lines along the road, the older children having to run longer distances than the younger ones. Most children wear their ordinary school uniform and footwear, a few wear shorts and running shoes while

a few others wear rubber thongs. Once at the specified departure line, the children are told to stay on the left side of the road and to run until they reach the arrival lane in the school yard. The teachers call out: "*A vos marques! prêts! partez!* (On your marks! steady! go!)" . Children start running and teachers walk back to school the short way. For about half an hour children run on the road while the traffic, some of which are very polluting buses and lorries, whisk by.

During the race, the physical education teacher runs with one group, the only teacher who owns a car and the school worker who owns a small motorbike drive around the circuit checking on children and the race. Back at the school and on arrival, children have to make their way to the 'official table' and give back the small card bearing their name and class number to the person in attendance. A few cheers are heard when the first ones arrive. Shamlesh has won the race. A little later, some girls piled in the car, too tired to finish, also arrive. When all have arrived, children line-up by the office as they usually do for assembly where the DHT flanked by the physical education teacher announces the winners. Children applaud mildly and many visit the taps once more for a drink of water before making their way back to class.

### **The yearly excursion**

Once a year each class goes on an outing that combines pleasure and educational purposes. All children of a similar grade and their teachers pile into a bus hired for the day. In addition to the bus driver and his assistant, the adult entourage is composed of the general purpose teachers, some DHT and Oriental language teachers (who go to

only one excursion according to choice or need) and sometimes the HT. Visits to places such as sugar cane factories, tea plantations and various historical monuments are usually organised but the highlight of the day for both teachers and pupils is the midday picnic. The picnic is a very happy one, one that teachers and pupils look forward to the whole year. Children come with "*tentes*" filled to the brim with various goodies and teachers come with a cooked lunch<sup>60</sup>. There seems, however, to be a dangerous "tradition" during these outings which is the consumption of alcohol by some of the male teachers and bus drivers during the lunch picnic and during the remainder of the afternoon. The potential for serious accidents is not difficult to imagine and was close to happening on two separate occasions. Despite the fact that some non-drinking teachers said to me that they did not approve of this 'tradition', they remained silent.

### Religious celebrations

In the course of the school year there are religious celebrations and festivals for which followers can take the day off while other people go to work or school. In April, the Muslim faithful celebrate *Eid-Ul-Adhq*. In the morning men and boys wearing the *Kurta-pajama* and *Topi* (loose shirt, drawers and a *haaji* cap) go to the mosque. Later on in the morning they and members of their extended family sacrifice a cow in their back garden and share its meat.

In Terre Bleue, Muslim children and teachers did not go to school on that day. They remained home to celebrate with their families. All other children and teachers came to school. For them also it was a very different day. In one class for example where ten

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<sup>60</sup> On this specific outing, lunch consisted of *gâteaux piments*, *samoussas* and *briani*.

children were absent, the teacher decided not to teach because he did not want "absent pupils to miss out". Children are therefore left alone. The only thing asked of them is to remain quiet and seated at their desks. The teacher spends the time marking students' work. In another class, teachers teach their own pupils. Additional pupils, those whose own teacher is absent, are squeezed in the far corner of the classroom and are asked to remain quietly seated. They spend the day doing so.

On this special day of Muslim celebration, the recess bell rang at the exact time that two cows were being sacrificed in the garden next door. Children rushed to the wire fence, the only separation between the school yard and the neighbours' garden, some half climbing it and witnessed the cows slow bleeding death, the rushing of blood all over the court-yard. In comparison with last year's celebration, none fainted this year.

### **Visitors in the school**

Four people from South Africa came to Terre Bleue to present a show with Africa as a theme. They set up a stage under a tree in the middle of the school yard and children and teachers gathered around them. Children seemed startled when the drum started to play, some giggled. The theme of the show was African animals and children were slowly drawn into action. Some were given a hat to act the role of ants or lions. Some children, mostly from lower grades seemed to really enjoy the show. Others mostly from upper grades spent their time talking, seeming at odds with how to behave in such circumstances.

At the end of the show, the children went to a truck parked in the school-yard to get a

free cup of *Milo*, many dropping their disposable cups in the school yard as they finished. Teachers and pupils then went back to their classrooms, the teachers complaining that all the show did was to make their pupils agitated. All resumed their normal activities. From my observations and after asking a few questions, I came to the conclusion that none exploited this visit for teaching lessons on that day nor next day.

## **Summary**

This chapter has generally depicted a day in the life of two Mauritian schools. I have described the two schools, introduced the people who frequent these schools, some of their activities and view points.

Four Hills is an urban five star school which has approximately 950 pupils and 45 teachers and is located in Plaines Wilhems district of Mauritius. Terre Bleue is a rural two stream school which has approximately 320 pupils and 25 teachers and is located in the Moka district of Mauritius. The two schools have very similar facilities. Schools consist of single and double storey buildings made of concrete and covered with corrugated roofs which are set in small grounds and are securely fenced in. The grounds are very small and tarred. One of the schools (Four Hills) has a playing field which is dusty in summer and muddy in winter.

On the whole, classrooms are tidy but because they generally do not display children's finished work or work in progress and because they generally lack maintenance and decorations, they are also austere and unsightly in appearance. Classrooms are rather small and their arrangements are similar across the grades of the two schools. In each

classroom, pupils' seats and desks are placed in neat rows facing the teachers' desk and the blackboard. During the day, children take books, slates and exercise books out of their school bags as need arises. Nothing is left on desks in between lessons or at night. On the whole, classroom furniture is old and worn and in some cases inadequate.

Both schools are wanting in educational supplies. They have library books which are kept under key and rarely used and each have a TV set that is not working in one case and not placed in a location conducive to its usage in the other. In both schools, space is also rather scarce. In Four Hills, up to eight people are supposed to share the office and in some of the popular upper grades class numbers can reach 50 pupils. In both Four Hills and Terre Bleue, classrooms are not sufficient in numbers to accommodate the teaching of the different oriental languages and there are no proper staff rooms.

In both schools, some parents of lower grade children accompany their children into class and communicate with teachers. In upper grades, on the other hand, contact between parents and teachers is limited, formal and often fidgety, especially when it comes to talking about CPE examination for those parents who have children in Standard VI, the last grade of primary school. In all cases parents do not participate in any of the aspects of school life once the bell has rung. They also do not participate in special happenings such as the yearly outings.

Participants in a day in the life of school are for the most part school based. They consist of teachers, people in the office, other staff, pupils and the occasional visitors. The categories of teachers found in Mauritian primary schools include general purpose

teachers who teach the four subjects, English, French, Math and EVS, oriental language teachers who teach Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Mandarin and Gujarati, specialist teachers who teach physical education and catechism and teacher trainees who are in school in order to gain teaching experience. However, in the specific case of Four Hills, the experience gained by the teacher trainees does not include teaching experience. Pupils are sorted in terms of grades. Lower grades include STD I, II and III and upper grades include STD IV, V and VI. Pupils in STD VI prepare for either passing or ranking at the CPE examination. In upper grades pupils are also sorted in different ability streams.

People in the office include the head teacher, deputy head teachers and in the case of Four Hills, a school secretary. Their tasks combine administration, supervision and public relation elements while status plays an important role in relation to who does what. Staff called caretakers run errands between the office and classrooms and between the school and outside. They also dispense the free milk and bread and clean classrooms at the end of the day.

For teachers and pupils, a day in the life of school consists of a routine that is very similar whether the day is spent in Terre Bleue or Four Hills and, in many ways whether it is spent in an upper grade or a lower grade. Routine consists of 'doing' the four subjects and for some pupils and in some grades of 'doing' oriental languages, catechism and physical education. Routine also entails prevailing practices. Teachers teach lessons in front of the class and pupils sit at their desk most of the day working on their slates or workbook. Pupils follow teachers' explanations and corrections given at the blackboard or occasionally get to go to the blackboard to work out or correct an



exercise in front of class.

Workload and time spent in school are two prominent differences between spending a day at school in an upper grade or spending the day at school in a lower grade. These differences are explained by the fact that in upper grades children take extra tuition before and/or after school, and this especially in STD VI, because they have to prepare for the CPE. For these reasons, in upper grades, the routine of both teachers and pupils is more strenuous than that of lower grades.

This chapter introduced two Mauritian primary schools, Terre Bleue and Four Hills and the various people who frequent, teach, learn and work in these two schools. It also outlined schools' routines and introduced some of the teaching and learning practices in these two schools. Having set the school context, the next chapter enters the world of classrooms in Terre Bleue and Four Hills, describing the world of teaching and learning in the classrooms of these two schools in more depth.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EXPERIENCING PRIMARY EDUCATION

This chapter describes pupils' experiences of primary education in the class settings of Four Hills and Terre Bleue. Data analysis produced two major themes: the nature of the work that regulates pupils' experiences and the contrasted experiences resulting from exposure to that work. These themes guide the presentation of findings in this chapter. A first section examines the key educational and other practices that regulate pupils' experiences of primary education in classroom settings. The second section establishes the common features as well as the dimensions of contrasts framing pupils' experiences. In this chapter, the data analysed, some of which was utilised for display, includes observational notes of classroom activities, interviews and transcripts of conversations as well as drawings relating the details of classroom experience.

#### **Teaching practices regulating the experiencing of primary education**

The previous chapter showed that, because of extra tuition, private tuition and marking, the workload of upper grade teachers is considerably heavier than that of teachers in lower grades. The pressure of the CPE examination makes working in upper grades somehow more critical than it is in lower grades. These differences aside, teachers of all grades, including oriental languages' teachers, organise their work and present their subjects in similar ways.

This section shows how teachers organise and present their work. The data utilised for

developing this section consist of the details of experience as recounted by teachers in interviews and of observational notes made during days spent in classrooms, especially those of two teachers Rama and Sarojni, both Standard VI teachers in Terre Bleue. Their work exemplifies, unless stated otherwise, the patterns of teachers' work as they have been observed in the classrooms of Four Hills and Terre Bleue.

Rama, introduced in the previous chapter, teaches STD VI A<sup>61</sup>. His pupils are working towards passing and in addition for some towards ranking at the CPE examination. Sarojni on the other hand teaches in STD VI B. One half of the pupils in her class failed the CPE examination the previous year. This year is their last chance to successfully pass CPE as there is an age limit<sup>62</sup>. Sarojni is a new teacher in Terre Bleue. Last year she taught in STD VI A in another school. The deputy head teacher (DHT) said that she has been given STD VI B because she makes children work hard. Sarojni on the other hand said that she would prefer having 'good elements' in her class. She anticipates that among her 35 pupils only three or four will manage to achieve the 30% of total marks necessary to pass the CPE examination. She also stated that because her pupils are so 'low', she does not bother to give them private or extra tuition.

Classroom teaching for both Rama and Sarojni proceeds along very similar lines. Their primary role as teachers, just as that of many other teachers in the primary schools of the world, is to oversee pupils' learning processes. In their particular cases and in that of all other teachers in Four Hills and Terre Bleue, their work is organised into four major activities:

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<sup>61</sup> In Terre Bleue, stream A has the most able pupils and Stream B has the less able pupils.

<sup>62</sup> To be allowed to repeat STD VI, pupils must be less than twelve years old.

- Directing pupils in their activities;
- Providing explanations;
- Checking pupils' comprehension;
- Checking pupils' work.

### **Directing pupils in their activities**

In both Rama's and Sarojni's classrooms, as well as in all other classrooms of Terre Bleue and Four Hills, teachers decide what children are doing or should be doing. At the beginning of each lesson teachers say: "*Tirez vos livres de Français ...de Math, d'Anglais, d'EVS!* (Take your French..Maths..English..EVS books out!)", At the end of lessons teachers say: "*Rangez vos affaires!* (Put your things away!)". These instructions and the writing of the date on the blackboard<sup>63</sup> for each subject punctuate and frame classroom's working sessions.

One of the common directives that teachers give to pupils is to read aloud. This practice is common and frequent in Rama's and Sarojni's classes but also in all classrooms of Terre Bleue and Four Hills. It is perhaps the practice that visitors from other countries, where chorus reading is not practised, notice first as they enter Mauritian schools. Teachers ask pupils to read or recite aloud on many occasions in the course of their working in class. In Sarojni's class for example, to keep pupils quiet while she is filling in the presence register, she asks them to recite time tables or read a text from their French, EVS or English book aloud during that time. Sarojni said: "while they read

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<sup>63</sup> At the beginning of a lesson, teachers write: "Math for Tuesday 2nd of March 1996" or "English for Tuesday 2nd of March 1996" and so forth on the board and copied in appropriate workbook by children.

aloud I am sure that they are doing some work!". In all classes of Terre Bleue and Four Hills and on many occasions during lessons, pupils are asked to read aloud. For example as the lesson progresses they are asked to read paragraphs and whole texts from textbooks<sup>64</sup>. At the end of the lesson they are also asked to read in chorus the questions of the exercises they have to do.

Some variation is sometimes offered when the text is quite long. Rama, Sarojni and, other teachers, for example, ask children of row one to stand up and read a segment of text aloud, then they ask them to sit down and the second row to stand up and continue reading the text aloud and so on until it is time to get back to first row. Sometimes, in order to force children into following the reading, teachers skip a row or two, so that all pupils are kept alert and follow in their book never knowing when their turn will come next.

At the end of lessons, teachers usually ask pupils to do written exercises in their workbook. This directive, once given, usually marks the end of teacher's involvement. Teachers do not circulate in class as pupils work out their exercises in their workbooks. They usually remain seated at their desks marking some pupils' work or, in some cases, reading the newspaper. Occasionally, some teachers may, at that point, leave the classroom to go out and smoke a cigarette, give the newspaper back to a colleague or to have a chat in the office. In any case, it is only at correction time that the teacher will renew contact with pupils.

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<sup>64</sup> Textbooks are provided free to all pupils.

At that time, teachers indicate to children the form that the correction of exercises is going to take. They may, for example, ask pupils to tick their own answers or ask them to exchange books with friends sitting in front or behind so that each will tick someone else's work. Sometimes they also ask pupils to copy in their workbook the right answers given and written by them on the blackboard. They may also, as Rama does during explanations, ask pupils to underline important words into their textbook.

In Rama's and Sarojni's classes and all other classes of Terre Bleue and Four Hills, what is meant by 'directing children in their activity' is the giving of directives. In both Rama's and Sarojni's classes and that of most teachers of Terre Bleue and Four Hills, these directives are given by teachers and are given to the class as a whole. Teachers' directives are used to structure both teachers' and pupils' activities of the day. They are also used to keep control of what children do, how they do it and how they behave. On some occasions, they are also used to give teachers some free time for marking or doing other things.

### **Providing explanations**

Teachers give directives, provide explanations and explain new ideas or material in similar ways in all classrooms and in both schools<sup>65</sup>. They address themselves to the class as a whole and rarely present anything new to one pupil or to a small group of pupils. An illustration of this happening has been presented already in the previous chapter, when a teacher decided to leave twenty pupils doing nothing, for a full day, because ten others were at home for the Muslim celebration of *Eid-Ul-Adhq*. The

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<sup>65</sup> Teachers of oriental languages and catechism teach in similar ways.

teacher said he did not teach because he did not want "absent pupils to miss out". That teacher needed the whole class to deliver his lesson and could think of no other way to engage two thirds of his pupils in learning activities while the other third was away. Pupils were allowed, as some did, to do "revising"<sup>66</sup>. Others did nothing except to keep quiet while the teacher was marking.

In conducting their lessons, teachers usually read paragraphs or whole pages of information straight from textbooks to which they sometimes add a few comments. The comments teachers give as they read aloud consist mostly of translation of English words which pupils do not understand into French or Creole. Sometimes, as a matter of emphasis, they also write on the blackboard some of the information they have been reading and ask children to repeat it in chorus or to copy it. At this point, teachers do not encourage questions. It is only later, that they ask the whole class if they have understood.

To explain new ideas and material, teachers may also work out an exercise on the blackboard as an example or a model for pupils to imitate when it is time for them to do written exercises. Rama, for example, often does so to explain mathematics. This is how he proceeds. First, he asks pupils to read aloud the questions in their mathematics textbooks. Then he asks children to follow his demonstration on the board. Pupils have their math textbooks open but are specifically asked to keep their work books closed. Rama takes the working of the exercise almost to the answer but refrains from giving it

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<sup>66</sup> "Revising" is a word often used by teachers. For example, on occasions, Sarojni tells pupils to revise their work because she does not want to repeat the same thing every day.

or writing it on the blackboard. He then erases what he has done on the board and asks children to proceed and work out similar exercises in their workbook, not omitting the answer this time. This practice was observed in many classrooms in both Terre Bleue and Four Hills. Teachers' explanations can be summarised as involving:

- The presentation of information (to which students have access in their textbooks) by either reading this information aloud or recopying this information on the blackboard.
- The telling of pieces of information to pupils and asking them to repeat it.
- The demonstration on the board of the right way of doing something and the request from children to imitate what they have seen..

Explaining new ideas and material consists of passing on information rather than making that information clearer. When quizzed on this information, pupils have three options: giving the right answer, giving the wrong answer, or giving no answer.

Encyclopedic knowledge is believed to be a very important criterion in appreciating the quality of teachers and teaching. This belief is widely held by most of the parents and teachers interviewed who said that they believed that you need to know more when you are teaching in upper grades than you do when you are teaching in lower grades. For example, in STD VI, the grades in which the major concern is preparing for the CPE examination, teachers and parents believe that teachers must "really know their subjects well" because their pupils, future CPE candidates, may be quizzed on anything learnt throughout their primary schooling.



Knowing one's subject well is said to be even more pressing when teachers are teaching the most able students in STD VI A. For example Soopaya, a DHT in Four Hills, recalls his apprehension at not knowing enough the first time he was asked to take a STD A:

I started teaching in STD III. The following year I taught in STD IV. Then I was given STD V A. As we reached September, the HT told me: 'Next year you are going to follow your pupils and take STD VI A'. I said: 'No way! I do not feel I am up to it!' There was a teacher who lived close by and who had a good reputation for that class. But the HT let me understand that I could do better than this teacher. The following year I was given STD VI A. It was my first time to do such class and as you can imagine I really had to work really hard, I had to read many books! (T9).

Soopaya feared not being familiar with the information he had to present to his class. He and other teachers believe that they must be able to readily recall any piece of the information and facts their pupils have to memorise for the examination. Teachers able to do so are labelled "*calés* (having solid knowledge)" and are described as: "Those teachers, you can ask them any questions, they know their subject well!" Like many other teachers, Soopaya was conscious of his poor spoken English and French and afraid of being corrected, as can be done by more articulate pupils in STD VI A.

In Rama's and Sarojni's classes as in other classes in Terre Bleue and Four Hills, providing explanation means the passing of information rather than the untangling of such information by teachers and the value put by teachers and parents on encyclopedic knowledge may account in some way for this practice. Teachers explain by reading or recopying facts onto the blackboard, to which pupils have already have access to in their own books. Teachers also pass on ways for doing something right or for giving the right

answer by giving a demonstration at the blackboard. The pedagogical value of this passing on of information is of course an important matter that will be dealt with later.

### Checking pupils' comprehension

During the course of their teaching, teachers usually ask questions to check whether pupils understand or have understood what has been said. A common way of asking such questions is illustrated by the following account of the beginning of an EVS lesson in Sarojni's class.

Before starting a new lesson Sarojni wanted to check that her pupils had "*assimilé* (assimilated)" what she taught them the previous day during EVS class. She asked the question: "What is gardening?" As pupils did not answer she helped them by saying: "Planting of crop, cultivating, culti?..." and then stopped for children to add "vating". She followed on by saying "grow?... "to which children added "ing". "We grow plants, cultivate fruits, flowers, vegeta?...bles. Some vegeta?... bles are eaten raw others are eaten when they are coo?...ked. You can't eat a potato raw you have to cook?... it" (FB/R pp. 23-24). She then proceeded to check if pupils had also assimilated the names of tools used by gardeners. She started by writing on the blackboard: "Tools used in the gar?" then stopped for children to shout "den". Following the same procedure, she wrote the names of some tools on the blackboard. When it came to lawn mower, she reminded the class that when they came to school in the morning someone was cutting grass with a lawn mower in the garden next door.

This example illustrates a 'start the answer and wait for pupils to finish it' technique and

points to some mistakes that can be made by teachers. The example of the lawn mower given by Sarojni is erroneous. The cutting implement used by the gardener was not a lawn mower but a grass cutter. We can also argue that potatoes, even if it is not customary, can nevertheless be eaten raw. Because there is no venue for pupils to express difference or contest the teacher, it is not known whether these mistakes were picked by any of Sarojni's pupils.

This 'start the answer and wait for pupils to finish it' technique is used by teachers of both Four Hills and Terre Bleue. It is used in class and during assembly. What exactly is being checked is however vague. This technique is perhaps more of a teacher's habit rather than a proven technique enabling them to check that something has been understood or memorised. Teachers know what they want and start words to ensure that they get the desired answers from their pupils.

Teachers use several other questioning techniques to ensure that their pupils understand or have understood what has been said. The following examples illustrate some of the ways in which questioning is done. In a first example, Rama reads a passage of the lesson on thermal power stations from the EVS textbook. He then proceeds to check if pupils understood the information he has just read by asking them the following questions: "How many power stations do we have in Mauritius?" "What is the difference between thermal and hydro?" "Which is the best for Mauritius?" "What does FUEL stand for?" These questions were asked of the whole class and all together pupils had to read their answers directly from their books.

In a second example, during a French lesson, Rama reads a passage in the textbook about "*Les droits de l'enfant* (Children's Rights)". He pauses and asks: "*Si une personne a plus de 18 ans est- ce que c'est un adulte?* (When a person is over 18 is that person an adult?)". The pupils are directed to the section where the differences between being a minor and an adult are written and all together restate that definition to the teacher. During that same lesson Rama asks: "*Détester qu'est ce que ça veut dire?* (To hate what does it mean?)". This question is asked of the whole class. Pupils are asked to search their memory in order to find the right answer. They remain silent and eventually Rama gives the right" definition, the one written in the text book which pupils repeat in chorus.

Rama resumes his reading concerning children's rights and then asks: "*Les états veillent à ce que les enfants ne soient pas séparés des parents. Qu'est ce qu'ils veillent?* (States insure that children are not separated from their parents. What do they ensure of?)". The pupils answer in chorus: "*à ce que les enfants ne soient pas séparés des parents*" (FB/Rpp. 68-69). This question is very much related to the 'start the answer and ask pupils to finish it' strategy discussed above (learners of the French and Latin languages may also relate this question to the types of questions asked of them during grammatical logical analysis). At the end of the lesson, Rama makes a last check, he asks: "Is all this understood?" To which children mechanically answer: '*Oui Monsieur!*' He then says: "Any questions?" To which pupils say: "*Non Monsieur!*"

In these examples, teachers display several techniques in their checking of pupils' comprehension. The 'start the answer and wait for pupils to finish' technique ensures that teachers get the answer they expect. Teachers also ask pupils to read their answers directly from the book, to fill in words, give a definition and at the end of lesson say

with all other pupils that they have understood. In spite of the fact that pupils do comply with what is asked of them by teachers, these techniques do not exhibit any evidence that pupils have understood what has been explained to them or that teachers understood what they have 'taught'.

### **Checking pupils' work**

Once teachers have conducted their lessons and given their explanations, they usually ask pupils to do written exercises. The marking, ticking and or signing<sup>67</sup> of such work is an important aspect of teachers' work for the following reasons. Every evening, parents who are interested in their children's progress may want to examine the work their children have been doing in class during the day. While they examine workbooks, they soon notice if marking is slack or even non-existent. Teachers' checking of pupils' work becomes the very thing parents can use to check on them. Another reason why marking is important is that, when inspectors visit classes, they inevitably ask for some workbooks and among other things, check if work is properly marked and if mistakes are not picked up.

As a result of these expectations, teachers go to great lengths to correctly mark pupils' work. For example, many teachers, especially in upper grades arrange free time for themselves by giving their pupils some exercises to do so that they can mark homework thoroughly. This, however, will again add to their marking load.

To avoid such increases in marking load, on occasions, teachers ask their pupils to bring

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<sup>67</sup> Teachers put their signature on the work that has been corrected by another pupil.

their work to the desk on completion of exercises. On these occasions, queues of children waiting to get their teacher's mark, are not uncommon sights in classrooms, especially during oriental languages, as teachers like to leave the class at the end of their forty-five minutes lesson period free of any marking.

In both schools, a general correction at the blackboard is the most common and frequent first device used by teachers for checking pupils' work. In doing so, teachers get to check on the work of the pupil doing the correction at the blackboard and also get to know who did the exercise wrong or right by asking just that. Teachers usually know in advance who is going to get it 'right' or 'wrong'. Knowing so, they very rarely send to the blackboard a pupil who is not going to be able to work out the question successfully and more rarely one who will never give a correct answer. "*Ces enfants-là* (these kind of children)" they say would make other children waste their time and are left alone. When it comes to correction on the board, teachers (and pupils) expect to see the right answers appear on the board quickly. Rama offers an ingenious variation to speed up proceedings of collective correction. He sends four pupils at one time to the board, each working on a different exercise. But Rama's class is A stream and he is quick to state that he could not do the same in a class with 'lower elements'.

For pupils, getting their work right or wrong simply means having the right or the wrong answer written in one's book. On occasions, however, I have observed that pupils who have not been able to work out that correct answer by themselves have ingenious ways of ending up with the right answer in their work book including cheating. My experience on this matter is that teachers choose to ignore the cheating

even when they know about it<sup>68</sup>.

The checking of pupils' work involves several activities: The conducting of general correction at the blackboard and the marking, ticking or signing of exercises in class. The fact that the work is done and that the correct answer is written on either blackboard or in workbooks are the aspects of pupils' work that teachers check in all classes of Terre Bleue and Four Hills.

### **Pupils' common and contrasting experiences**

This section examines how pupils experience the classroom activities directed by teachers. Data on this subject speaks of both commonalities and contrasts. On one hand, the pictorial data related to the classroom setting and drawn by pupils reflects the uniformity of teaching practices that have been described above. In both schools, for example, pupils represent their being in school seated at their desks, looking at teacher and blackboard and all engaged in uniform tasks. While pictorial data shows homogeneous aspects of the ways in which school is experienced by pupils, observational more in-depth data, such as observing pupils while they are involved in classroom activities, shows clearly on the other hand, that despite similar and constructed classroom environment, pupils experience their learning activities in various and contrasted ways. In this observational data three major processes or features have emerged as the major influences that frame these differences. They are categorisation of pupils, differential treatment of pupils and differentiation in pupils' experience. These

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<sup>68</sup> I suspect that my presence in class may have been the reason why 'cheating' was not punished on the spot. When, on other occasions and in both schools, I asked children what happens when they cheat, most said that they get shouted at and that they also get the *Rotin Bazar* (stick used for corporal punishment).

themes, together with the commonalities of experiences as they are represented in pupils' drawings, guide the presentation of findings relating to the nature of pupils' experience of classroom activities.

### **Common experience**

This section establishes what constitutes the major and common aspects of the ways in which pupils experience their classroom activities. The data analysed for this part consists of pictorial representations by pupils of both schools of their classroom. It also consists of the comments made by three Mauritian specialist educators about these representations<sup>69</sup>. The analysis undertaken by these people consisted of examining pupils' drawings, searching for common patterns of experience. Some of the remarks they made while looking at the drawings were written others were audio taped. Excerpts from their observations and a summary of their analysis are presented in this section.

The following is an extract of the comments made by Mira, one of the Mauritian specialist educators who examined pupils' drawings of classrooms. This extract has been chosen because it contains within itself the themes that the other educators have stated as the major and common aspects of the ways in which pupils experience their classroom activities.

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<sup>69</sup> These specialist educators belong to the group of research participants labelled "educationists" in the methodology chapter. These educationists are art and psychology specialists. The analytical procedures are also described in Chapter Four.



Looking at these drawings, the thing that strikes me is really that most of these children's representations reveal confinement to the classroom. The teaching is confined within the four walls of the classroom with the teacher as the main centre of attraction, and of course the big blackboard which repeats in most drawings. What these children have tried to depict in fact is the reality, the chairs and desks are placed in rows, very systematically, properly arranged and the method of teaching is didactic, all the children are concentrating on the teacher looking straight ahead. There is no movement in class whatsoever, you can't see a fly moving, you can't see a child moving, everybody is fixed at his table... You see the teacher at a distance, standing very rigidly next to the blackboard and the children are like trained soldiers sitting at their tables. I would have wished more interactions, where you know you would have found a group of children around the teacher and things like that... You just find that sort of rigidity about the school as it were a training centre. You just go in there in the morning and get out of there in the afternoon... I find the same stereotype, the same symbols repeated. There is no difference between the perceptions of younger children and older children. There are the same symbols repeating, the same concepts, you see the teacher with the blackboard and the desks and tables neatly arranged. It does not show much about interaction doesn't it? The big blackboard so black! Oooh... There is no sort of flexibility in the classroom where children could have group discussion and where they could get involved. It's all in symmetrical arrangement and there is no freedom of movement (P5).

During conversation with Mira and the two other specialist educators, the examination of pupils' drawings revealed four areas of common experience: idea of confinement, uniformity of experience, locus of experience and nature of interactions. These four areas are examined in what follows.

### **Images of confinement**

Like Mira, the two other educators were impressed by the strong and recurrent images of confinement when they examined pupils' drawings and on all occasions talked about this theme first. Just as Mira, they talked about pupils' drawings as giving a strict and unimaginative representation of the classroom environment, as depicting life inside the classroom which most of the time excludes outside life and fantasies.

They commented that the few drawings incorporating some aspects of life outside the classroom displayed a marked contrast of representation between the outside and the inside. For example, pupils use vibrant colours for flowers, temples and people outside the classroom environment and use bleak colours for anything inside the classroom.

According to the specialist educators these drawings reveal the strong desire expressed by many pupils to escape the confinement of the classroom environment. On occasions, they likened the notion of confinement to that of imprisonment. This is the case with the many drawings showing classrooms as compartmented sections with closed and numbered doors.

### **Uniformity in experience**

Specialist educators noted that in most drawings, classroom arrangements are similar, the teaching style is evident and consistent, all children remain seated in their places and all are engaged in common tasks. Everything in the classroom is tidy and every one and everything has its place. They were, however, surprised that this uniformity of experience applies to all grades. They were expecting for example that the representations of classrooms' activities drawn by younger pupils would show more activities, more freedom and more games.

### **The locus of experience**

The three educators commented upon the prominence given in pictorial representations to teachers and the blackboard. They stated that both are perceived as the focal points of classroom activities and as the most important influences on pupils' classroom experiences. They noted that in most drawings, the teacher is omnipresent, represented

on a much larger scale than pupils and the only person with a face. They also noted that the blackboard is present in all drawings in one form or the other, that in most drawings it is black, centred and occupies most of the space on the paper. In other drawings furniture and books are also represented in exaggerated proportions. For example, textbooks are represented as larger than pupils themselves. In some cases, children are not represented in class or appear as blended into the furniture. These drawings according to the specialist educators show clearly that pupils see their teachers and the nature of their work as the most important element of their experience in classroom activities and that they, as individuals are very small or even do not exist.

### **The nature of interactions**

The fourth theme commented upon by Mira and the other educationists is that the drawings of classrooms show very little and selective interactions. They stated that in the drawings the only visible interactions are happening between the teacher and pupils, that the teacher remains at a distance and that no drawings show interactions among pupils in the classroom setting. They also noted that many drawings show teachers holding the stick, which is commonly used in class to point at words on the blackboard and to discipline pupils. According to the specialist educators the drawings also show the favoritism that teachers display towards some pupils. For example, some drawings show the presence of flowers on the front tables only where good pupils are seated. They also noted that other drawings show favorite pupils sitting at teachers' tables, while teachers are absent. These 'good' pupils are usually in charge of discipline while teachers are away. They write the names of pupils who do not behave as required on the board and generally report on pupils' behaviour when teachers return.

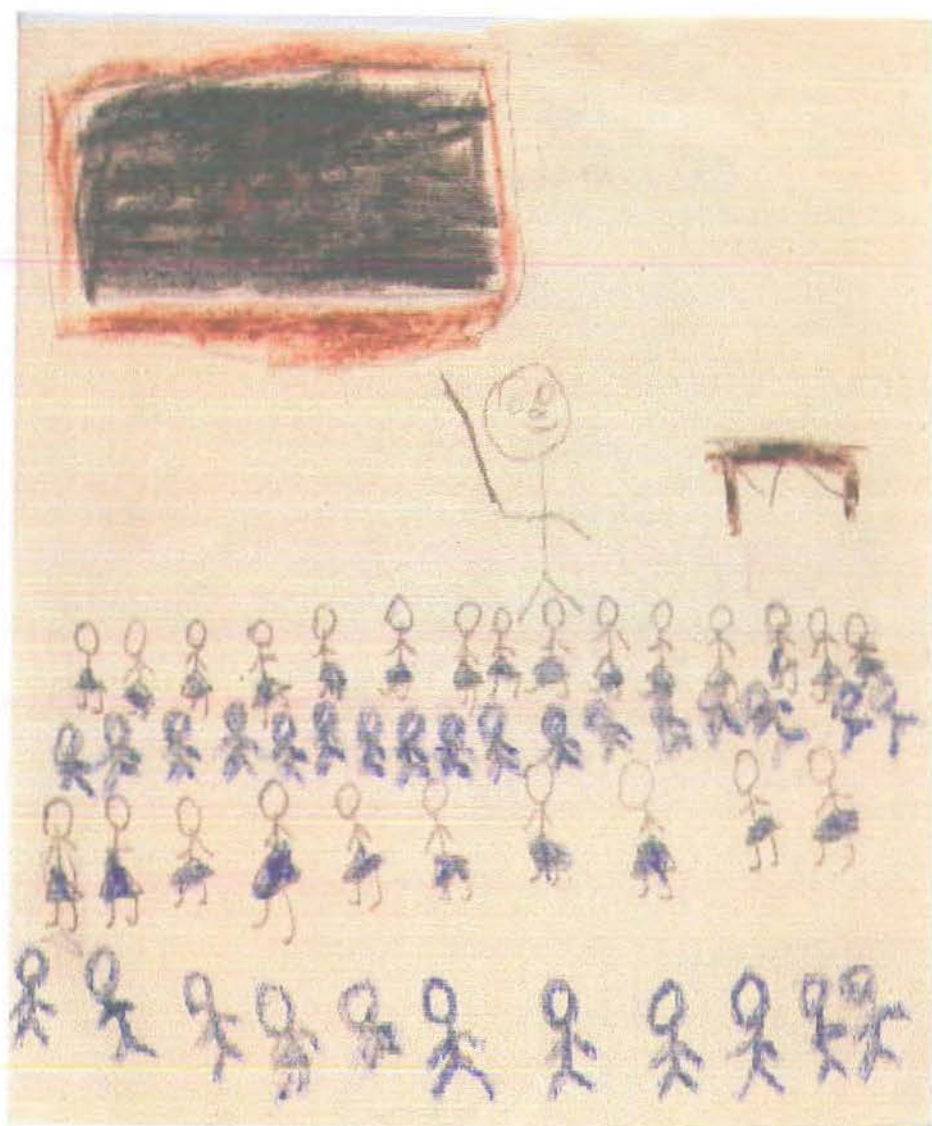


Illustration 21. My classroom (Drawn by a STD II pupil in Terre Bleue).

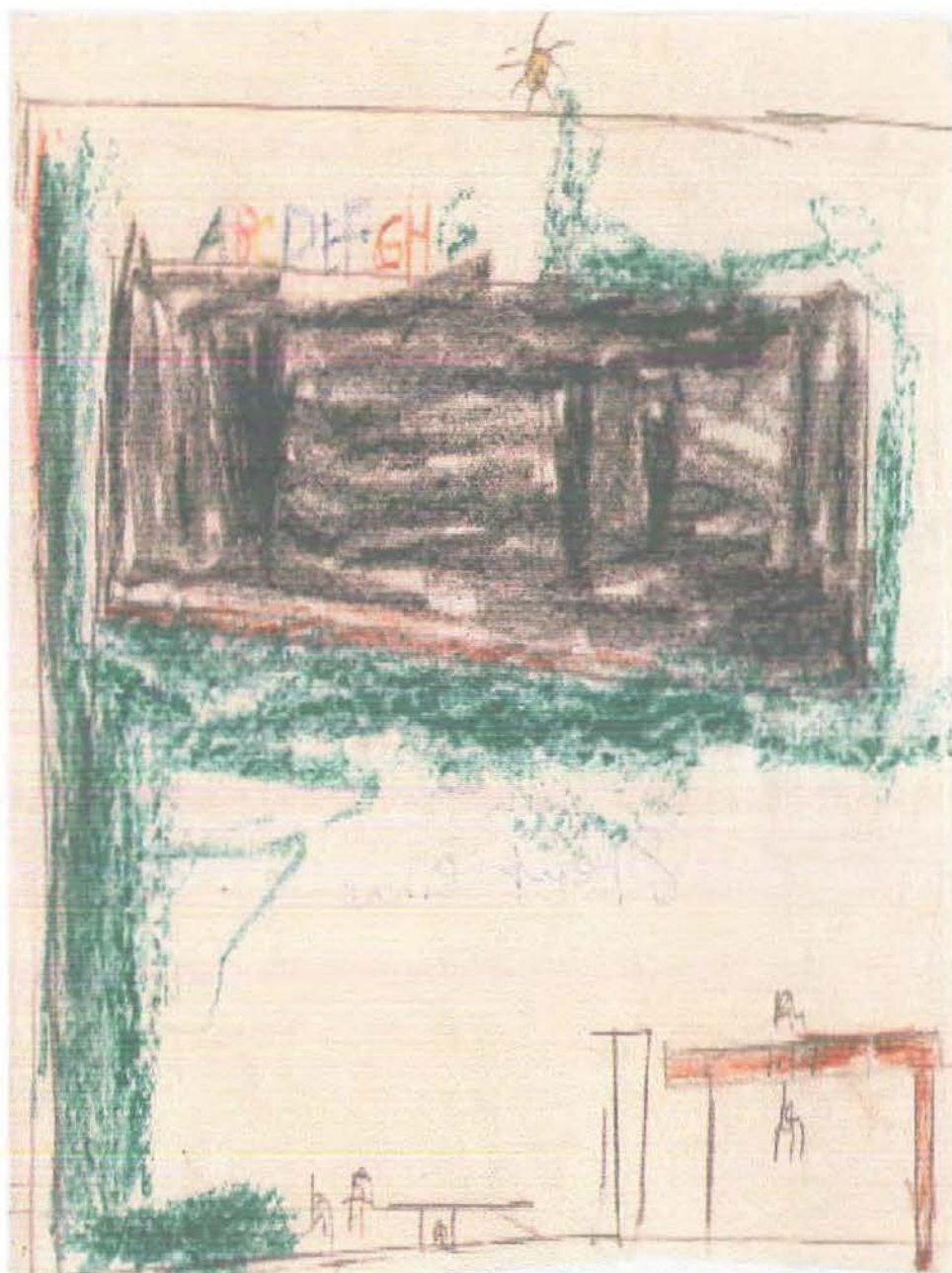


Illustration 22. My classroom (Drawn by a STD III pupil in Terre Bleue).

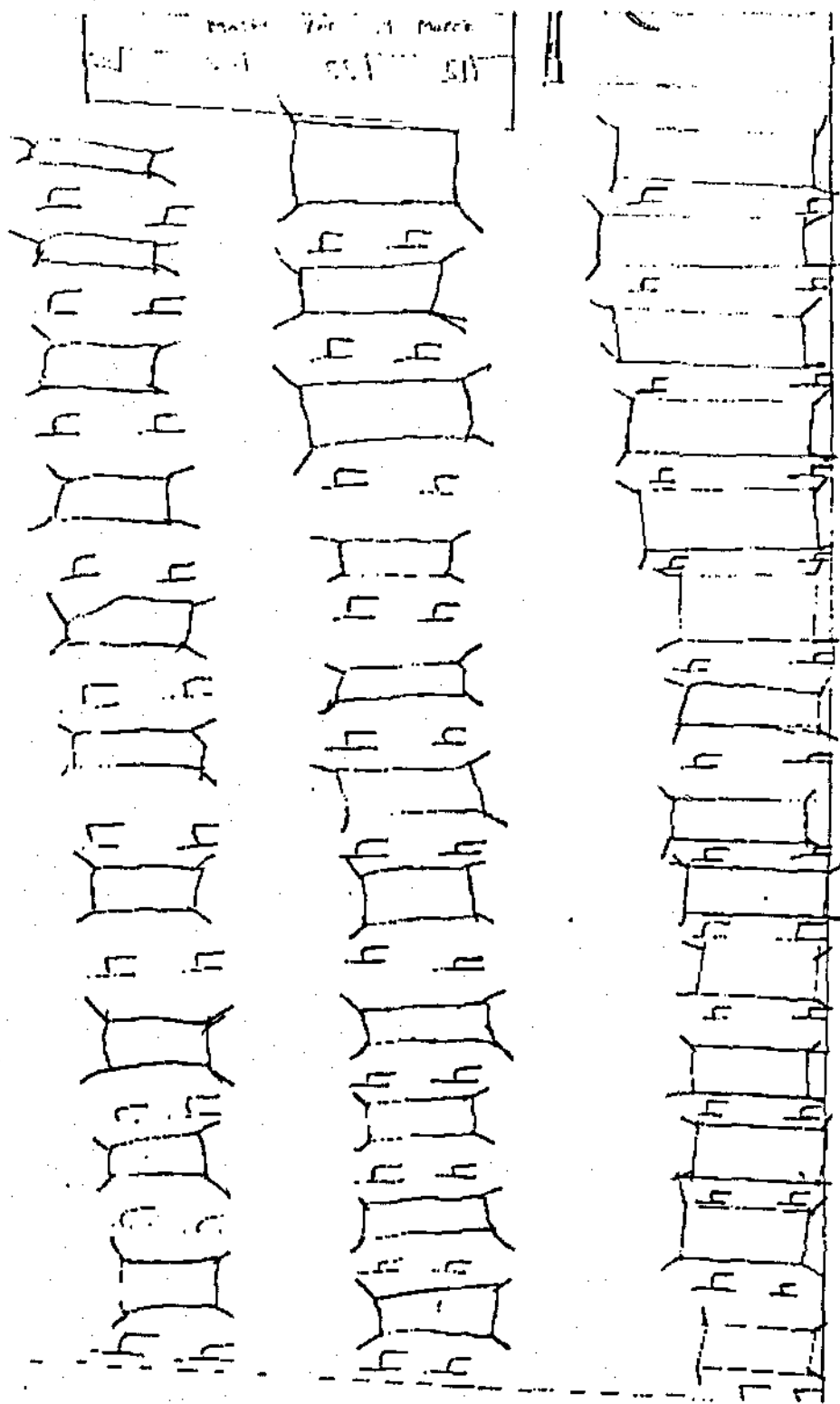


Illustration 23. My classroom (Drawn by a STD VI pupil in Four Hills).





Illustration 24. My classroom (Drawn by STD I pupil in Four Hills).

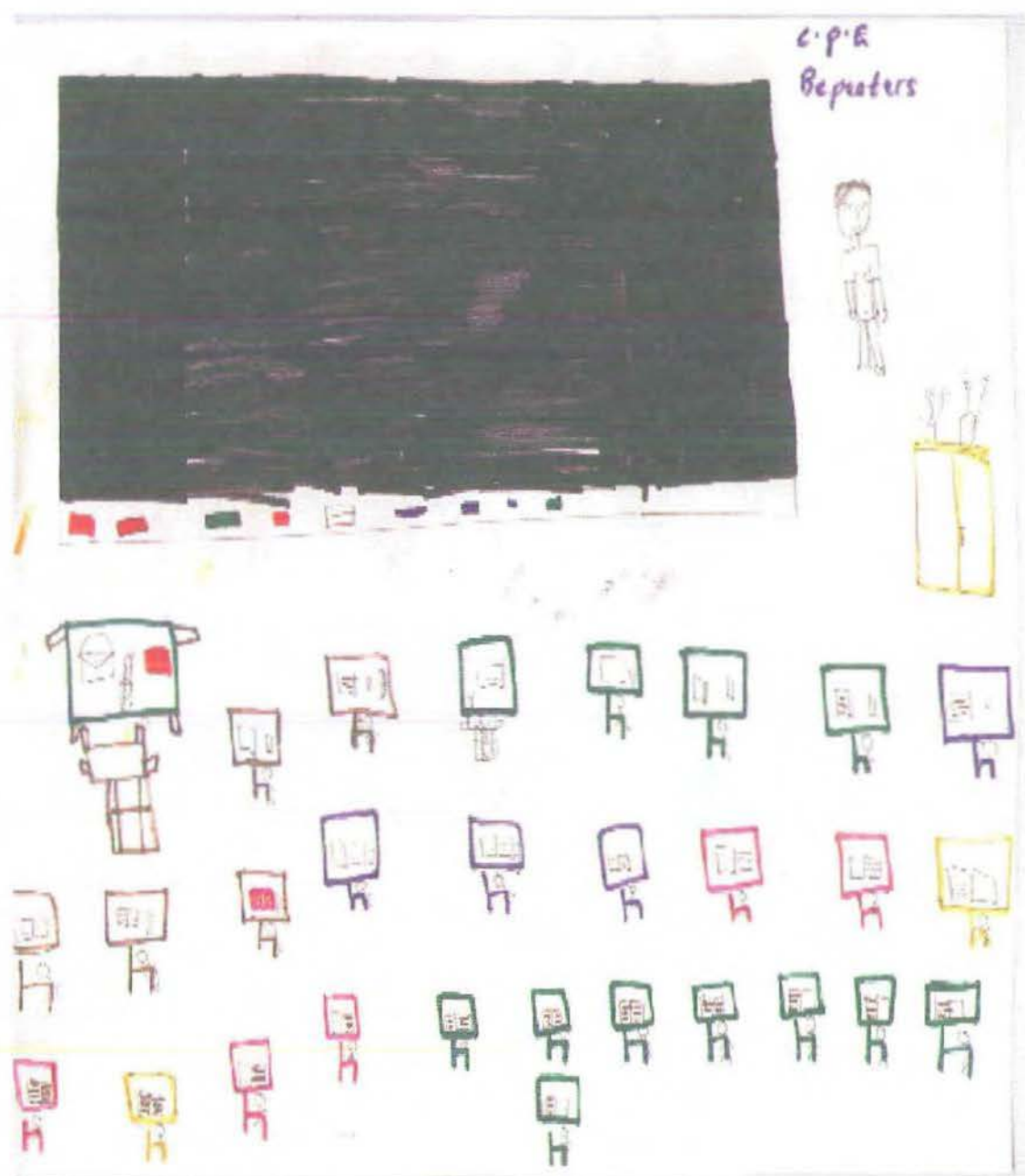


Illustration 25. My classroom (Drawn by a STD VI “repeater” in Four Hills).



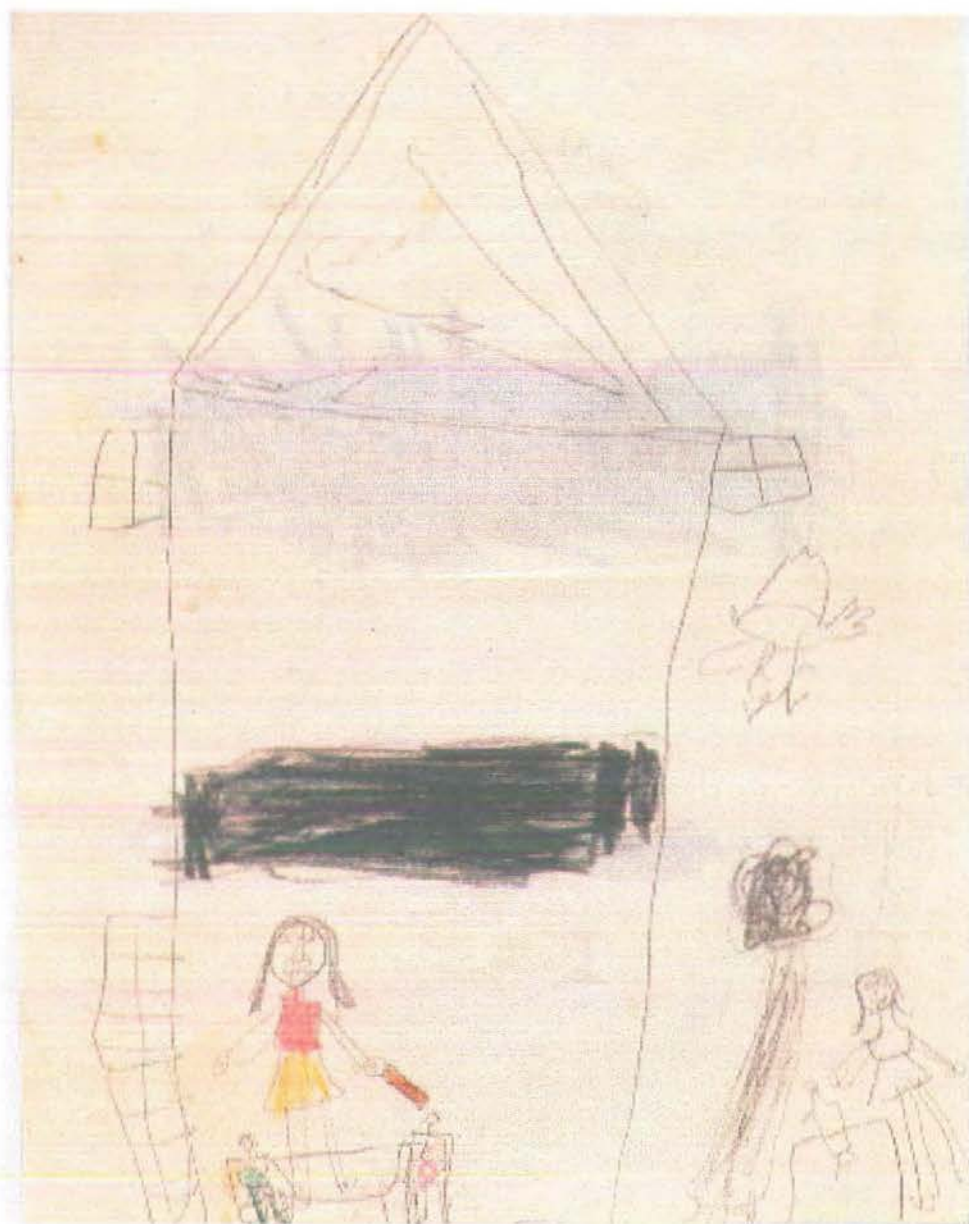


Illustration 26. My classroom (Drawn by STD II pupil in Four Hills).

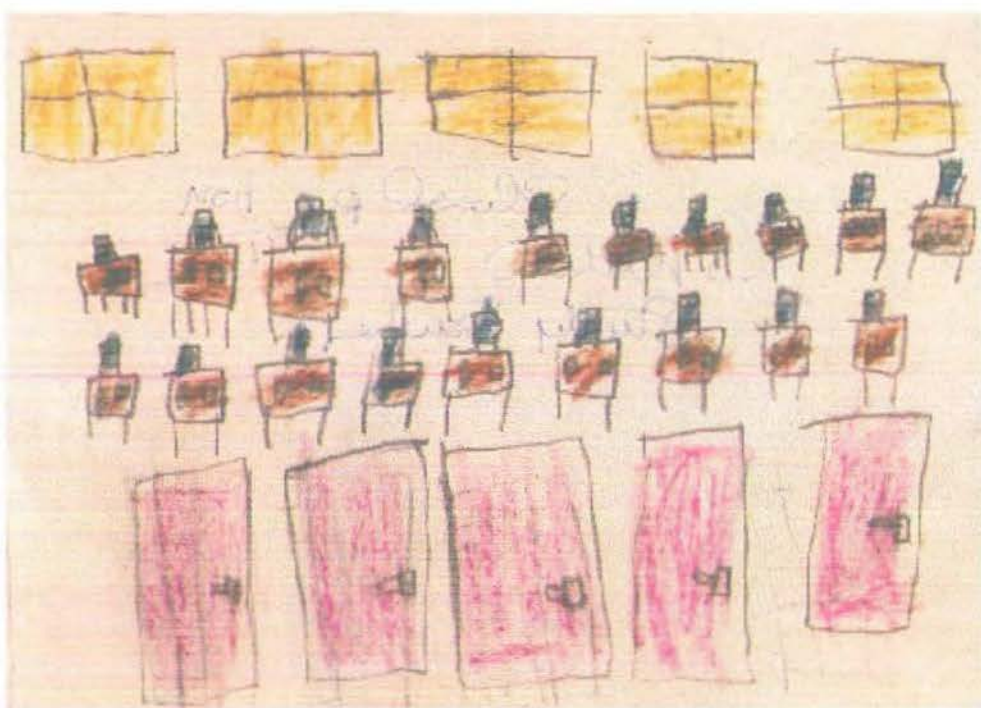


Illustration 27. My classroom (Drawn by STD III pupil in Terre Bleue).



Illustration 28. My classroom (Drawn by SDT II pupil in Terre Bleue).



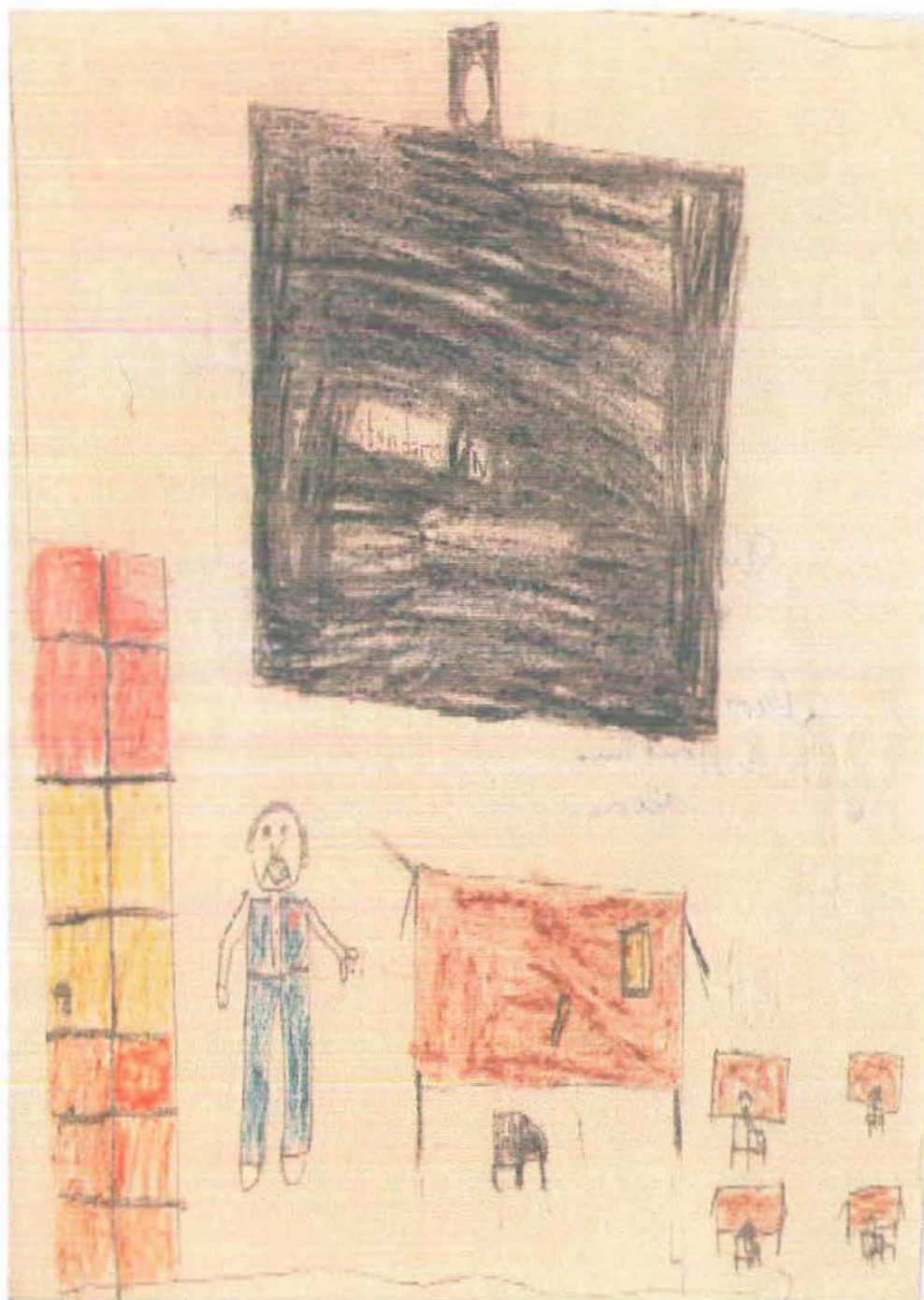


Illustration 29. My classroom (Drawn by STD IV pupil in Four Hills).

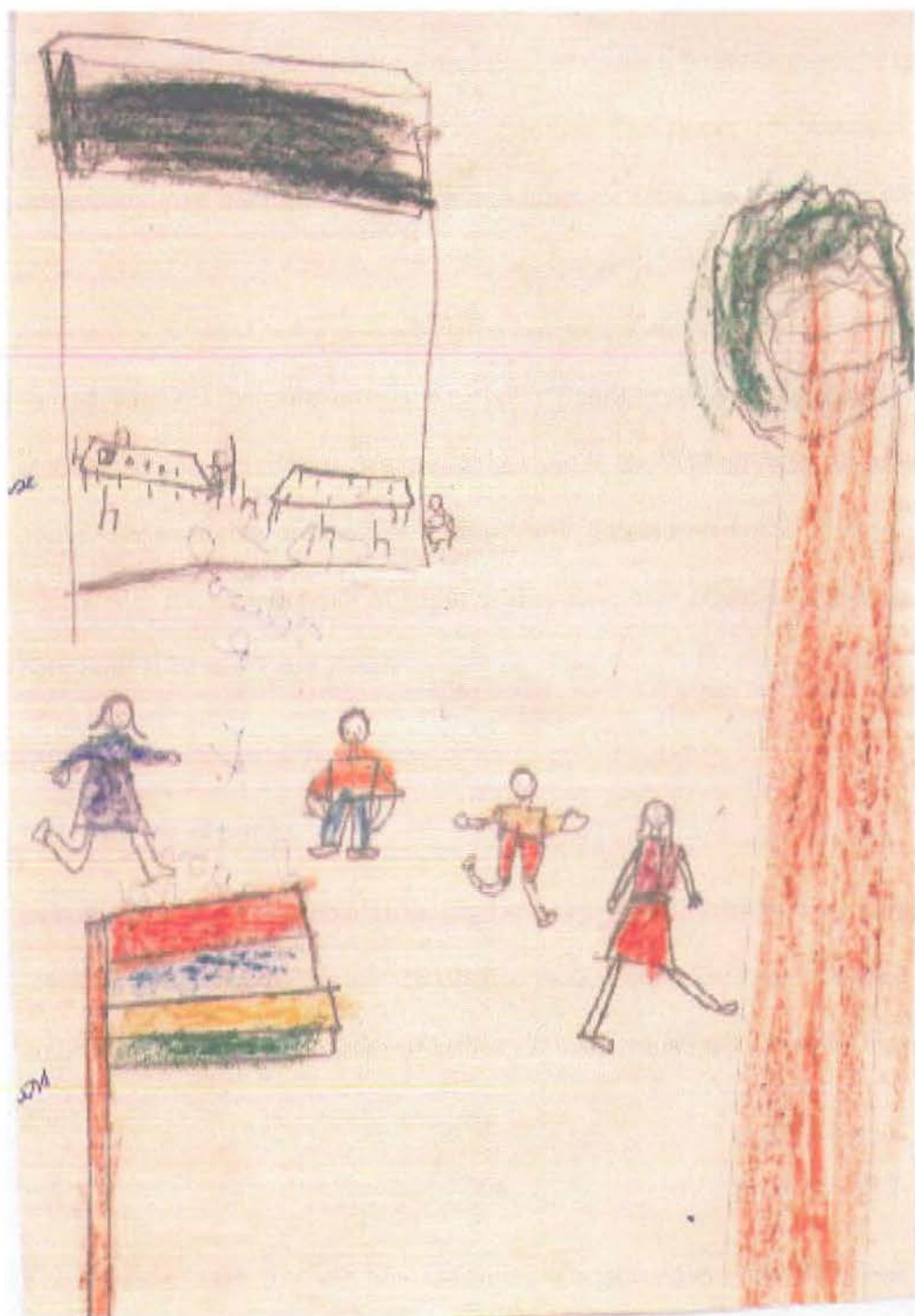


Illustration 30. My classroom (Drawn by STD III pupil in Four Hills).

### **Dimensions of contrast**

This second section examines the dimensions of contrast found in pupils' experience of their working in classroom settings. Observational data shows that processes of categorisation of pupils are in place within school settings and reveals the effects these processes have on the ways in which pupils experience their classroom activities. This section first reports the ways in which the categorisation processes are organised and second, analyses their impact on the nature of pupils experience. Data analysed for this second part consists of interview transcripts and in-depth observational studies of pupils. The examples used in this section typify, unless stated otherwise, patterns of experiences for various types of pupils as they have been observed in classrooms of both Four Hills and Terre Bleue.

### **Categorising of pupils**

In both Terre Bleue and Four Hills, teachers' categorisation of pupils is achieved by labelling and streaming. Pupils are labelled in all grades. They are streamed in STD V and STD VI the last two grades of primary school and are not streamed in the other grades.

The following table displays how streaming is organised in Terre Bleue and Four Hills and incorporates the describing words commonly used by teachers categorising pupils according to their levels of ability.

**TABLE 24: THE STREAMING OF PUPILS IN TERRE BLEUE AND FOUR HILLS SCHOOLS**

	FOUR HILLS	TERRE BLEUE
STD I STD II STD III STD IV	No streaming. Each class combines mixed ability pupils.	No streaming. Each class combines mixed ability pupils.
STD V STD VI	<p><b><u>A Streams:</u></b> Classes made up with "excellent elements". (In STD VI, pupils are preparing for ranking at CPE).</p> <p><b><u>B Streams:</u></b> Classes made up with "good elements". (In STD VI, some pupils are preparing for ranking at CPE).</p> <p><b><u>C Streams:</u></b> Classes made up with "low elements".</p> <p>In STD VI, class comprises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low ability pupils trying for the first time to pass CPE .</li> <li>• "repeaters" trying for the second time to pass CPE</li> <li>• "repeaters" who have passed CPE previous year and are repeating hoping to rank</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>A Streams:</u></b> Classes made up with "excellent" and "good elements". (In STD VI, all pupils are preparing for passing some for ranking at CPE).</p> <p><b><u>B Streams:</u></b> Classes made up with "low elements".</p> <p>In STD VI, class comprises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low ability pupils trying for the first time to pass CPE.</li> <li>• "repeaters" trying for the second time to pass CPE</li> <li>• "repeaters" who have passed CPE and are repeating in order to rank at CPE</li> </ul>

Words in quotation are commonly used by teachers in primary schools to differentiate pupils' abilities.

Pupils are streamed according to 'abilities'. Table 24 shows, for example, that in upper grades, 'excellent' pupils are found in A streams. In all schools, the A stream class always comprises the most able pupils. The level of pupils' ability in various streams is, however, relative. For example, A stream classes of STD VI in Four Hills, because it is a Star School, attract and comprise exclusively 'excellent elements' while A stream

classes of Terre Bleue, an ordinary two stream school, have just a few 'excellent elements'. In Four Hills for example, B streams are middle streams and comprise 'good elements' but some of these B stream pupils may have a chance at ranking at CPE. In Terre Bleue on the other hand, the STD VI B stream comprises the 'low elements', the 'repeaters'.

The slotting of children into these various categories is principally made according to the level of their achievement, that is the marks obtained at the end of the year examination<sup>70</sup>. As a result, pupils are labelled by their teachers as 'low', 'good', 'excellent elements', to describe the level of pupils' ability in the various streams. These words are commonly used by teachers in both schools and warrant some clarification. For the word "element" this clarification is linguistic. This word *élément* is used in the French language to describe pupils in terms of their intelligence and in relation to their degree of achievement by comparison to other pupils in their class. French speaking teachers anywhere and not just in Mauritius would, for example, say about a pupil: "*C'est le meilleur élément de ma classe* (this is the best pupil in my class). However, these teachers would not say "I have 35 *elements*" in my class.

The words 'low', 'good' and 'excellent' qualifies the level of pupils' achievement at examinations. They are also used by teachers to characterise the degree of success pupils show in being able to follow instructions, in giving correct answers to questions and in obtaining good marks for their daily tasks and their home work.

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<sup>70</sup> In STD V and VI, end of term examination papers come from the Ministry of Education. In lower grades, end of term examination papers are prepared by teachers. All teachers of a similar grade will get together and produce a common examination paper for each subject. Oriental languages teachers will do the same for examinations in their respective languages.

The word “repeaters” generally stands for less able pupils who have failed to pass the CPE examination the previous year and on the whole has a negative connotation.

However, some repeaters can also be pupils who have passed the CPE but are repeating because they have failed to rank at a level enabling them access to a “good college”<sup>71</sup>.

Sarojini and Rama have pupils of different ‘ranks’ in their respective classrooms. Sarojni’s class, for example, comprises pupils she describes as low elements and repeaters. Most of her pupils have achieved low marks at examinations during the previous years and she expects that only three or four will manage the 30% marks necessary to pass the CPE. She also does not give them private tuition claiming that “because they are so low it is not worth it”. In her class, it is difficult for her to keep pupils engaged in the activities she presents to them or expects of them. In her class, work progresses at a slow pace and on the days I spent in Sarojni’s classroom, pupils did not finish their work and very few had done their homework.

Rama’s class on the other hand, comprises pupils he describes as “good” and “excellent”. His pupils have achieved higher marks than Sarojni’s pupils at examinations in previous years, are expected to pass CPE and for some of them to rank at CPE. Rama gives extra and private tuition to his pupils in order to increase their chances at CPE. In Rama’s class work progresses steadily.

These examples show that the categorisation of pupils entails differences in several

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<sup>71</sup> What is meant by “good college” is explained in great detail in the next chapter.



areas. The first area of differences concerns pupils' achievements, measured in terms of their capability to follow teachers' directives and explanations, capability to give the appropriate answers to their questions and capability to achieve good scores at examinations. The second area of differences concerns teachers' expectations. Sarojni expects very little of her pupils and consequently asks little of them and does not provide extra tuition. She knows that her less able or, should we say, less knowledgeable pupils, will have no chance at CPE because that examination consists of a recall of factual information gathered all throughout primary schooling. Rama on the other hand has high expectations of his pupils and gives them private tuition to increase their chances. The third area of differences concerns pace of work and behaviour. Sarojni's pupils, for example, work at a slower pace than Rama's pupils and on occasions their work does not get finished. Her pupils are less engaged in their activities than Rama's pupils are in their own. These areas of differences are explained further in the following section.

### **Differentiating experience**

In both schools, Standard V and Standard VI classes generally comprise pupils of relative homogenous ability. In upper grades, contrast, for the most part is therefore found by comparing pupils of a same grade in different ability streams. It is useful to restate that despite their varied abilities pupils are exposed to similar teaching practices. The impact of such practices on the experiences of two very different pupils is what this section analyses.

In this section the classroom experience of Shamlesh<sup>72</sup> and Anju is contrasted. They are both STD VI pupils in Terre Bleue. Shamlesh is an 'excellent' pupil in Rama's stream A class, Anju is a 'low' pupil in Sarojni's B stream class. In the specific context of Terre Bleue, Shamlesh is considered as an 'excellent element'. If he were to go to Four Hills he might also have been considered as an 'excellent element' or just as a 'good element'. In both schools, Anju would retain her label of 'low element'. The experiences of these two pupils typifies the patterns of experience of two sorts of pupils, one usually described as very good by teachers, the other one in contrast, described as not so good by teachers. The following communicates and contrasts some of the dimensions of differences as these two pupils experience their classroom activities.

- Contrasting what Anju and Shamlesh say during class activities.

Shamlesh always answers questions put by the teacher to the class and consistently gives the right answers to these questions. For example, during the EVS lesson, when Rama asks how many power stations there are in Mauritius, Shamlesh looks in his book and with the other pupils reads the names of these stations aloud. He also volunteers questions when teacher says any questions? For example, at the end of the French lesson on Children's Rights, Shamlesh is the only pupil who has a question to ask Rama. He says: "If a child is in difficulty and his parents don't want him at home any more where should he go?" To which Rama answers: "The police or phone 999".

Shamlesh points to the occasional mistakes Rama makes while teaching class. For example when Rama writes "*Tu désire* (you desire)" at the blackboard Shamlesh raises

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<sup>72</sup> Shamlesh nearly did not participate in the 'cross country race' because his parents were opposed to his participating. They were made to change their mind by Rama. Shamlesh took part and won the race.

his hand and says: "*M'sieur au présent y'a un s!*" (Sir, at present tense there is s)" Rama corrects his mistake, he adds an S to "*tu desires*" and says to class: "This can happen to anyone!" Shamlesh also corrects the mistakes other children make. For example during the correction of a mathematics exercise, when four pupils were at the board simultaneously, working out different exercises, Shamlesh raises his hand and says to Rama: "*M'sieur, le premier exercice c'est pas bon!*" (Sir, the first exercise is wrong!). To which, Rama replies: "Thanks, we'll talk about it later!"

Anju in contrast says very little in class. She moves her lips when Sarojni asks the class to recite tables or when pupils are requested to read the answer in their textbooks. She repeats what Sarojni or other pupils say and contrary to Shamlesh, does not volunteer questions. She just says "*Oui Miss*" to Sarojni and "*Oui Monsieur*" to the Hindi teacher with the rest of the class when these teachers ask pupils if their work is finished or if they have understood. She does so despite the fact that she has not finished.

- Contrasting what Anju and Shamlesh do during class activities.

Both Shamlesh and Anju do two kinds of actions: those that are specifically requested of them by their teachers and their own actions.

Shamlesh always complies to what is requested of him by Rama. For example, he takes his books in and out at the requested time, raises his hands when teacher asks a question, ticks when it is time to tick, listens and smiles when teacher volunteers a joke. He follows in his book while teacher reads aloud, reads aloud with other pupils when it is their turn to do so and sometimes, when asked to do so by Rama, he provides an

explanation for the whole class. He also starts his written tasks as soon as they are given and finishes them on time.

During the course of the day there are few occasions when Shamlesh's actions are his own rather than responses to teacher's directives. For example, he has occasional and quiet interactions with some friends, lending them something or chatting with them in between lessons. He also got up on a couple of occasions while everybody else was doing their exercises, once to get the dictionary Rama keeps on the top of the cabinet and the second time to put it back. During the morning break time, in which children eat their lunch, he turned in my direction and asked me what Australian children eat for their lunch.

Anju, to some extent also complies with what is required of her by Sarojni. She takes her books in and out upon request. She looks at the blackboard when Sarojni or other pupils are there. She looks at Sarojni while she is explaining a lesson, repeats after her or other pupils and moves her lips when pupils are required to read paragraphs in textbooks. When it is time for doing exercises she copies the date from the blackboard and copies the first question in her exercise book. She never manages to find time to actually do, let alone finish, her written tasks.

During the day Anju, just as Shamlesh, does find occasions to do her own things. On ten separate occasions during the day for example, Anju retrieves a sweet from her bag and puts it in her mouth. She spends a good part of her time drawing doodles on her textbooks and exercise books, sometimes rubbing them out. She does so while Sarojni is

teaching as well as when it is time to do written tasks. During those times, she also looks out of the window, drops things, plays with some coins or with her book cover, in one instance ripping it, smiles at some other pupils and occasionally says a few words to them while Sarojni's back is turned. She also on several occasions fans herself.

- Contrasting Anju's and Shamlesh's attention to their tasks during class activities.

At all times during the day Shamlesh is very focussed on whatever he is supposed to do. He looks at the teacher at all times while he is talking or every time he moves. He also looks at the blackboard all the times it is used by either the teacher or another pupil and looks at pupils while they are reciting something or answering a question. The words interested, attentive, active and careful characterise his stances.

At all times during classroom activities, except on the two occasions when he has to move to get and put back a dictionary, Shamlesh remains seated at his desk either squarely or on the edge of his chair. In spite of remaining seated and because he is continually busying himself with everything he is asked to do, Shamlesh's body language gives an impression of high activity.

Anju's attention is very different to that of Shamlesh. While his was permanent and active Anju's attention is intermittent and passive. She only looks at Sarojni and the blackboard on occasions or when she really has to. Most other time she busies herself doing the other activities described above. The words bored and blank characterise her stances. She sits, head in hand and slumped at her desk. She is as inactive as Shamlesh is active.

- Contrasting the degree of Anju's and Shamlesh's involvement in classroom activities.

Shamlesh complies with what is expected of him and actively participates in all activities. He always answers and always finishes what is required of him to the standards set by his teacher. His answers are always correct and he volunteers questions showing that he is interested in what he is doing. When he busies himself doing his own things these activities are related to class activities or show that he is eager to learn more.

He is an active listener to both his teacher and his friends and does not seem to miss anything. His interactions are mostly to do with his teacher whether he is answering direct or general questions or whether he corrects the few mistakes his teacher makes. He has also some limited interaction with other pupils. On the whole it could be said that Shamlesh interacts at the maximum level authorised by the system. Shamlesh is attentive, active and very focussed. He is successful in his actions and seems well adapted to whatever is asked of him. Shamlesh has a smooth experience.

Anju on the other hand does things that make her look like she is participating. She is somehow doing what is required in terms of being quiet and of taking her books out. However, she is not engaged in working. When she busies herself with her own things, these activities are either to pass time or give some comfort. Her actions never demonstrated that she understood, cared or was interested in her school-work.

Earlier in this chapter, Sarojni was quoted explaining that when pupils read aloud they are doing some work. Anju's reading aloud is a typical example discounting that claim. Anju appears to be reading aloud but on occasions her book is not open at the right page and at all times she is just repeating with a delay the words her friends are reading.

Anju's work never gets finished. Her involvement in classroom activities can be classified as a cover up involvement, pretending to work so that she remains unnoticed. On the whole Anju appears quiet and bored. She is unfocussed and isolated. She never gets any positive or even negative feedback hence perhaps the self gratification with sweets. She has adopted survival strategies, which on one occasion included cheating. The only time during the day in which she communicates with Sarojni has to do with the cheating mentioned earlier, an action Sarojni chose to ignore.

### **Differential treatment of pupils**

In lower grades pupils are not streamed. Classes comprise pupils of various abilities within one classroom who, depending on their level of ability, are more or less capable of successfully adapting to the activities demanded of them by teachers.

Yet, in their actions, teachers show that they expect similar results from all kinds of pupils and that because less able pupils cannot adapt and perform, they are left behind. Teachers say that they are concerned with finishing the curriculum and that they have to present their material at a certain pace. They say that, as a result, they do not have time to slow down for those pupils who "understand nothing" or are "much slower".

The following is an account reconstructed from notes written while spending the day in

a non streamed lower-grade classroom<sup>73</sup>. The account shows the actions of two less able pupils, relegated at the back of class. This account also demonstrates some of their teacher's actions.

It is a maths lesson, the teacher has asked pupils to do some exercises in their workbooks. A little boy and a little girl are left alone at the back of classroom. They do not do the exercises. One of them is playing with the page she has torn from the math book. The other one does nothing. Teacher does not reprimand them nor ask them to bring their work for marking. To explain things for me, the teacher tells me that they do not want to talk or work. Yet, on many occasions during the day, I remark that they have quiet conversations together. This little girl and this little boy are physically separated from others, the distance between the desk they share and others is greater than what appears as a regular distance between desks. When teacher asks the class to take English books out, both the little girl and the little boy ignore that directive as they are having a quiet conversation. Teacher does not intervene. All other children are hit by the *Rotin Bazar* when they are not following instructions. At some stage during the English lesson, the boy and the girl have discretely rearranged themselves around their table so that they can see what is happening outside. Another time during that same lesson the little girl leaves the class without asking permission. Soon after the little boy follows her. They return two minutes later. ... It is now a creative education lesson<sup>74</sup>. This lesson consists of following teacher's instructions and making a paper windmill. The boy and the girl have gone to teacher's desk to have their windmill pieces cut out on the dots. They resume their seat after queuing for seven minutes as other children's papers were cut but not theirs. Now and then the little girl stands up and shouts at some one who happens to have one of the three pairs of scissors that have to be shared by 34<sup>75</sup> pupils: 'You! Pass me the scissors!'

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<sup>73</sup> In this specific example, and for ethical reasons, I do not indicate whether the teacher is from Four Hills, Terre Bleue nor which grade. The practices described in this account are common to many teachers in Four Hills and Terre Bleue. Attributing them to a specific teacher that could be recognised would serve no purpose except perhaps to identify one teacher for a practice while the whole community of teachers behave in similar ways.

<sup>74</sup> All children have a creative education book which they use on occasions. Pupils cut out shapes from these books and colour "already drawn" drawings in these books. On many occasions, children, knowing my interest for drawings, traced a bird or flowers from these books and gave it to me.

<sup>75</sup> In the context of Four Hills and Terre Bleue, a class comprising 34 pupils is not crowded.



But nobody does. Fifteen minutes later, the boy and girl are still at their table waiting, the boy has eventually put his paper away in his bag. The girl on the other hand still tries to have her windmill parts cut out along the dotted lines and goes back to the teacher's desk. Timidly the boy follows her with his paper quickly retrieved from his bag. Teacher is just about to cut the girl's windmill when a boy comes to the desk with a beautifully finished windmill. Teacher abandons cutting the girl's windmill and shows the beautiful windmill to class. The girl and boy and other children standing around the desk are asked to resume their seat as teacher is now going to glue windmill pieces together. The boy gets back to his table and puts his paper away in his bag for the second time. Girl does not obey and stays around. When the teacher turns her back she puts some glue on children's noses.

After a while the teacher sends pupils back to their seats and tells them to finish their windmills at home. The girl goes back to her seat. As she is doing so, the teacher asks her to get the broom and sweep all papers from the floor. The girl obeys and when she finishes she resumes her seat and starts asking pupils around her for a pencil.... (FB/R pp. 119-126).

It must be stressed that this example has been selected to exemplify, but also because it is common in essence to other cases and circumstances of, differential treatment of pupils. It is also important to note that creative education is done on rare occasions and in this particular case was probably prompted by my presence in class.

During the creative education period, both pupils did show signs that they were eager to participate in activities, yet could not participate without the cooperation of their teacher. The label of non-participant they obtained during other more 'academic' classes, remained on their 'forehead', even when their actions clearly showed that they desired to participate.

These notes also show that these two pupils were not treated as other pupils in the class,

that nothing was expected of them, that they were not even disciplined as other pupils were. They were ignored, getting differential treatment. For these reasons they just passed time during Math and English and did not manage to do anything during creative education.

It is also important to note that both these pupils started their primary schooling with their present teacher who within a couple of months labelled them as 'slow learners'. They were labelled so and consequently left alone because they were not perceived as having a sufficient level of brightness that could enable them to follow instructions. These pupils will move up to STD III with their present teacher where the same conditions can be expected to prevail and will be perpetuated by that same teacher.

The labeling of these pupils as 'slow learners', 'low elements', and the consequential differential treatment of these pupils during classroom activities, are common occurrences in both schools and even from the start of their schooling. Teachers often like to say that two months into the first term of STD I, they can see who is going to succeed at CPE and who is not. Less able pupils are branded 'slow learners' by teachers and usually tend to spend their time at the back of class, disengaged from what happens in class even, as the example shows, when the activities proposed by the teacher seem more attractive.

The differential treatment of pupils in class can be explained by the fact stated earlier that teachers see their work as the presentation of facts rather than facilitating pupils' learning processes. Teachers are not trained to facilitate the learning of less able

learners. These two pupils experience very little in terms of learning except perhaps the learning from an early age of the way others perceive their place in life.

## Summary

Observational data shows that for the most part teachers' work consists of organising pupils' learning processes. Teachers have been found to direct pupils in their activities, provide explanations about new material, check pupils' comprehension or memory and check their work.

The first item, teachers directing pupils in their activities, consists of giving directives to the whole class. These directives structure teachers' and pupils' activities during the day. They are used to keep control of what pupils do, how they do it and how they behave.

The second item, teachers providing explanations, consists of passing on information rather than untangling this information. Teachers do so by reading aloud paragraphs from textbooks or by copying them onto the blackboard. On occasions, teachers also demonstrate the right way of working an exercise or write the correct answer for an exercise on the blackboard.

The third item, teachers checking pupils' comprehension, consists of questioning techniques: (a) starting and asking pupils to finish a word, (b) asking pupils to read their answers in chorus and directly from their textbooks or to give answers for which

there is only one right response. Comprehension is in that sense seen as the ability to give verbatim answers, as they are found in textbooks, to oral or written questions.

The fourth item, teachers checking pupils' work, consists of conducting general correction at the blackboard and also of marking, ticking and signing pupils' finished work, checking the fact that the work is done and that it contains the right answer.

The comments made by Mira and the other specialist educators reflect the uniformity of teaching practices presented in the previous section. Their comments support the constructed and similar ways of classroom experience where teachers and work at the blackboard are the points of convergence and where pupils are all engaged in common tasks.

The drawings they have examined and the comments they have made about them, reveal more than simple exposure to common teaching practices. They also reveal some of the deeper perceptions that pupils have of the classroom environment and activities. For example, on examination of these drawings, it becomes manifest that in their pictorial representations of classroom, the majority of pupils, both older and younger pupils, strongly associate their being in classroom with physical and mental confinement. It also becomes clear that pupils' representations of classrooms communicate their and their teachers' lack of individuality in the classroom setting during activities and their complete dependence on teachers for their learning and interactions.

The pictorial data depicting the classrooms confirms earlier findings of widespread exposure of pupils in all grades to similar and constructed environment and to similar

teaching practices. It also reveals that, in general, pupils relate their time in the classroom to feelings of confinement and even imprisonment and indicate their desire to escape such environment. It also reveals that pupils see their teachers, the blackboard and generally their work as the most significant aspects of their experience in class and see themselves with very little individuality within that environment. Their interactions for the most part are with teachers who are seen as distant and do not include other pupils. The pictorial data reveals that, on the whole, pupils are dependent on their teachers for their experiences in the classroom.

Observational in-depth data of classroom activities brings dimensions of contrasts to these common features. Three major features of the categorisation of pupils, the differential treatment of pupils, and the differentiation of their involvement in classroom activities, have been revealed.

The first item categorising of pupils shows that in both schools the upper grade pupils are sorted in various streams by teachers, according to the perceived degree of abilities and are labeled as "excellent", "good", or "low" while those who have failed at the CPE examination are labeled "repeaters". These various degrees of ability are the rationale for the grouping of pupils in the various streams.

In both schools, A streams comprise the most able pupils. The composition of B and C streams varies according to schools. In Four Hills B streams comprise able pupils in Terre Bleue B they comprise the least able pupils. Terre Bleue does not have C streams, which in Four Hills comprise the least able pupils.

The data shows that categorisation of pupils and their grouping into different streams, entails distinctions in several areas:

(a) Pupil's achievement. In all streams, pupil's achievement is measured in terms of capabilities to (1) follow teachers' directives and explanations; (2) give the appropriate answers to their questions; and (3) achieve good scores on examinations.

(b) Teachers expectations of pupils. In streams comprising less able pupils, teachers have low expectations regarding pupil's potential for achievement and consequently ask little of them and do not provide extra tuition. In streams comprising more able pupils, teachers have high expectations regarding pupil's potential achievement and consequently give them private tuition to increase their chances at the CPE examination.

(c) Attitude to work. In streams comprising less able pupils, these are less engaged in classroom activities and work at a slower pace than pupils in other streams

The second item: Differential treatment of pupils show that in both schools, lower grade pupils are not streamed and that these classes comprise pupils of mixed abilities. Data shows that in these classes, less able pupils branded as slow learners can be left alone at the back of class, disengaged from what happens in class even when, on rare occasions, the activities proposed by teachers appeal to them and can be accomplished by them.

Teachers are not able to accommodate for the fact that pupils have different needs. As a

result these pupils experience very little in terms of learning apart from learning from an early age how others perceive their place in life.

The third item: Differentiation in involvement shows that there exists prominent differences when comparing the experience of pupils of same grade levels but in different ability streams. Data shows that “excellent” pupils in A streams participate actively in daily tasks, frequently interact with the teacher and less frequently with other pupils and successfully achieve all tasks demanded of them. In contrast, data shows that “low” pupils in other streams do not participate and even pretend participation in daily tasks. Their interaction with teachers is limited to the bare minimum and also limited with other pupils and they never complete their work.

In the first instance, the deportment of excellent pupils displays involvement that can be described as flowing and unwavering. It also show that these pupils have successfully adapted their behaviour and actions to what is demanded of them and get rewarded by good marks and teacher's interest. In the second instance, the comportment of low achieving pupils displays involvement that can be described as ‘cover-up’ involvement. These pupils have also adapted their behaviour and actions so that they can remain unnoticed. They are isolated and are never rewarded by teachers.

This chapter has described pupils’ experiences of primary education in the class settings of Four Hills and Terre Bleue. It has shown how teachers organised and presented their work and how pupils experienced the classroom activities directed by teachers. Having presented the school processes, the next chapter outlines what pupils and teachers,

together with parents and educationists prioritised and construed as issues in their experience of primary education.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### STAKEHOLDERS' VOICES

In the two previous chapters I have outlined an understanding of school processes and experiences in two Mauritian primary schools Four Hills and Terre Bleue. This chapter builds upon what has been presented in the previous two chapters and outlines what participant stakeholders construed as the dominant aspects/issues in Mauritian primary education and their perception of the working of these issues. Voices in this chapter are those of pupils, parents, teachers as well as those of individuals from the group of people labelled educationists<sup>76</sup>.

The data analysed includes transcripts of interviews, especially the part in which participants were invited to reflect on the meaning of their experience of primary education and/or on their understanding of primary education. It also includes the stories written by pupils, more particularly those which recount an imaginary dialogue between themselves and a sibling who does not want to go to school.

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<sup>76</sup> The group of participants labelled "educationists" includes individuals from the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), from the Ministry of Education, the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES), the Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCEA) and non government organisations (NGOs). As explained in the chapter detailing the methodological approach of the study, the individuals who make-up the 'educationist' group were chosen to give their informed view point about primary education in Mauritius in general rather than their view about education in Terre Bleue and Four Hills schools in particular (all, except one, did not know the name of the two schools in which field work took place). All were schooled in Mauritian primary schools, some have taught in Mauritian primary schools. Some have children in Mauritian primary schools and all work in occupations directly related to some aspect of Mauritian primary education. Unless specified otherwise, the educationist group counts as the voice that reflects a broader Mauritian understanding of the present circumstances and issues of Mauritian primary education.

The delineation adopted during data collection, of considering participants as school-based participants and outside-school participants, has been kept for organisational reasons for the presentation of findings in this chapter. The first part of this chapter presents issues relating to Mauritian primary education as they are experienced perceived and prioritised by pupils, teachers and parents while the second part presents issues relating to Mauritian primary education as they are perceived and prioritised by educationists.

Moreover, in order to alleviate complexities that could arise from multivoices, the presentation of findings in all sections of the chapter is organised around "instrumental case studies" which have been used to play a supportive role, facilitate and generally help to understand issues that go beyond the case itself (Stake, 1994). The comments made by Devika, Vadivel, Bala, Kiran, Victoria, Tara, Ariff, Philip, Lalita and Noor<sup>77</sup> presented in this chapter vary in length and amount of details. They are utilised as examples in order to demonstrate how parents, pupils, teachers and educationists construe primary education. These examples facilitate understanding of the nature and dynamics /dialogicality of what people construe as issues and priorities of Mauritian primary education. They also assist the multi-voices approach and concept of the study while the narrative style in their presentation brings into light the world of every day life and personal experience that the study evokes.

## **The voices of pupils, teachers and parents**

### **Devika**

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<sup>77</sup> The names used in these cases are fictional. As in previous chapters, these names are a true reflection of the gender and ethnic group of the people to which they have been given.

Devika is twenty-five years old and has two children, an eighteen month old baby girl called Tara and a five year old boy called Nirvesh who is a STD I pupil in Terre Bleue<sup>78</sup>. Her parents were very poor, had many children and no time to look after them. Devika's father worked as a labourer fixing roads while the mother worked in the cane fields.

Most days Devika said, she would go to school empty handed, return home where sometimes there would be something to eat for lunch and sometimes not. Devika did not have fond memories of her primary schooling. She said: "I sat at the back, with my runny nose, Miss did not like me, teachers did not care, they used to beat me ... just seeing their faces made me scared!" (R11).

Devika managed to complete her primary schooling and to enroll in a secondary college. She recalled that at college some teachers were kind to her while others were "*méchants* (mean)", shouting at her because she did not have any books or because she did not do her homework. She also recalled that teachers never tried to understand why she did not do her homework. Devika's family could not afford to buy school books. She had to borrow them from others in order to do her homework and often found this difficult. Another reason was that her mother's illness made it very difficult for her to concentrate on school-work. Her mother became ill when Devika was in Form I. Devika nursed her sick mother as well as doing household chores. She was too tired and had no time to do her school homework.

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<sup>78</sup> Devika accompanies Nirvesh to school every day. Interviews with Devika took place under the shade of a tree in the school-yard, once all pupils had resumed their classes.

When visiting her mother, who had been hospitalised, Devika observed nurses and thought of becoming one herself, “*Souvent mo reve mo vine nurse mais mo pas ine reussi* (Often, I dreamt of becoming nurse but this dream did not come true)” (R11). When Devika was in Form II, both her mother and her father, who had been ill, died. Following their death, Devika abandoned school and with no money, went to live with neighbours who she said mis-treated her. Later, she gained employment in a garment factory and was able to move back to her old home. Because she had abandoned her schooling and could not read well enough to pass the exams Devika never became a nurse. When she turned eighteen, she married Satish a bus driver, whom she describes as a good husband and father. Devika stopped working in the factory before her first child, Nirvesh, was born. She now stays home and looks after her family.

Nirvesh, her son, is a STD I pupil in Terre Bleue. In the following statement, Devika communicated her aspirations for her childrens’ future as well as her views on the role she perceives education plays in creating a better future for them.

*Pou zotte arrive, enna la case pou zotte reste. Guette couma moi, mo mamam mo papa ine mort, pas ti ena narien! ... Ki zotte capave depand lors Zotte, pa mou fie dimoune, pas pou alle zeste cotte voisin, couma moi ine passe! Pou zotte lire! Capave arrive si conne lire. Si pas conne lire, pena valeur! Si ou lire ine tigit, capave alle n'importe ki place, dimoune pas pou couyone ou conne ou conne lire! Si ine ecrire ene l'enseigne la-bas, ou conne ki ine ecrire, cotte pou alle, bas bizin diman dimoune! Si ou lire, ou conne dans ou la vie ou pas pou passe misere. N'importe ene place pou gagne travaill. Leducation, li bien necessaire pou ene z'enfant! ... Mo dire li pou (Satish) nou ine fini, nou bizin guette pou z'enfants . Nous bisin tout faire pou nou z'enfants! Nou bisin donne zotte ene bon l'education. Bisin faire ene demarche pou zotte arrive ene jour! (R11).*

I want them to succeed. I want them to have a roof over their head, me when my parents died I had nothing! ... I want them to be independent, I don't want them to have to depend on others, to have to live with the neighbours as it happened to me! I want them to read. You can succeed if you know how to read. When you do not know how to read you are a nothing! You read even just a bit and you can go anywhere, people leave you alone, they know you know how to read! You know what is written on that sign there, you know what is written, you know where to go, you don't need

to ask anyone! When you know how to read, you won't be unhappy in life, you'll get a job. Education is really useful for a child! I say to him [Satish] our time has passed, now we must think about the children. We must do everything for our children! We must give them a good education. We must do everything for them to succeed!

In the mornings, as Devika walks her son Nirvesh, a "turbulent child", to school, she tells him:

*Faire bon z'enfant, lire bien, écoute Miss, pas faire mauvais di tout, appranne, metttr la tête l'esprit lors qui Miss ke pi cause, écoute bien Miss ki pe cause, ki pe écrire guette bien écrire et pa faire mauvais z'enfant, pas fatigue personne, pas la guerre (R11).*

Be a good boy, to read, listen to Miss, not to be naughty, to learn, to concentrate on what Miss is saying, to be attentive to what Miss is saying, what she is writing, not to be naughty, not to give any trouble to anyone, not to fight.

At lunch time, Devika brings Nirvesh's lunch to school and together with other mothers, she sits on a bench in the school-yard while the children ate their lunch. Back at home in the afternoon, after collecting her son from school, Devika said that she gives him bread and tea, lets him rest for a while and then:

*Mo appelle li, mo assise are li, mo montre li lire. Mo assise depi disons ene heure de temps, une heure et demi are li. Mo conne tous les jours mo pe donne li, mo pe faire li appranne ene heure de temps, ene heure temps et demi. Ca pe ramasse dans so la tete. Li fini appran , parfois li dire moi li ine fatigue, li envie jouer. Mo pas empeche li mo dire li alle joue ene tigit. Li joue. Lere tantot aussi, lere so papa vini. . . . Ler la so papa assise are li ene ti gitte, li guette si pas ki li ine apprann, li demande si pas li pe conne, pose le ene des questions. Nou tou le de are li, nou pas quitte li tout sele. Mo content mo z'enfant lire, beaucoup content! (R11).*

I call him and I sit with him to show him how to read. I do that for about one hour an hour and a half. I know that every day I can give him, I can make him learn for about one hour to an hour and a half. That way he accumulates knowledge. When this is finished, sometimes he tells me that he is tired, that he wants to play. I don't stop him I tell him, he can go and play. Then his dad returns from work....His father sits down with him and verifies what he has learnt. His father asks him questions. We are there beside him, we do not leave him alone. I want my child to read! I like it!

Devika's new dream is for her boy to become a doctor and her daughter to become a nurse.

Most parents, just like Devika, said they did not want their children to experience the economic difficulties they themselves have experienced in their own childhood. Most parents said: "We were poor before you know!" and: "It was not like this before, we were poor!". As Devika does in her account, parents, especially the poorest ones, remembered the difficulties and hardships they experienced as children.

When we were in primary school, we used to get up at 5 a.m. to help in the sugar cane fields with the rest of the family before we went to school.... Today's children, they have everything, books, note-books, pens, shoes. For us it was not like that, our first concern was to have something to eat something to drink and something to wear. In the morning we would take a *pain maison* cooked by mother with a little bit a curry inside and we would make our way to school, not a cent in our pocket, no shoes nothing! We had to argue to have a piece of cloth to put in our pocket because the teacher in those days insisted that we had a handkerchief in our pocket. We were so poor! I did even own the shirt I was wearing, the trousers I was wearing! (OT4).

Interviewed parents who, like Devika, experienced a poor or relatively poor childhood in the economic sense, said that factors such as hunger, lack of the basic necessities, inadequate clothing and having to work, have burdened and deterred their learning at school and asserted that they do not want their children to experience these conditions. In addition, most parents said that they consider the ability to read and write as an absolute educational minimum. Like Devika, most interviewed parents valued the autonomy that being able to read gives to people. Like Devika, most parents linked this autonomy with feeling safe and remarked that someone who knows how to read is less likely to be taken advantage of.

All interviewed parents established a link between education and their children's future potential. Like Devika, who wants her son to be a doctor, most parents have high expectations for their child. The association between education and children's prospects is at the core of the findings presented in this chapter. What this association entails for various participants will be further explored as various perspectives unfold. Given that link, most interviewed parents say that they have a role to play in order to maximise the positive effect of education. Most compared themselves with their own parents, who they often described as illiterate or semi illiterate, as having to work very hard to feed their family and as having very little time or inclination to get involved in their children's homework. Like Devika and Satish, most viewed additional work as a factor contributing to their children's educational success. The value most parents put on additional work and how teachers view additional work will also be discussed further as cases unfold.

### **Summary**

Devika's words introduced and illustrated several of the issues raised by parents of both Terre Bleue and Four Hills schools. Like Devika, most interviewed parents said they did not want their children to experience the difficulties they themselves have experienced in their childhood, said they had high professional ambitions for their children and said that they view the providing of basic necessities and the organising of additional work at the end of the school day as important and beneficial factors for their children's educational success and future employment prospects. Each of these issues will be further examined as cases unfold.

Vadivel has been chosen to introduce and illustrate issues voiced by teachers. The comments made by Vadivel support and broaden the topics presented earlier.

### Vadivel

Vadivel began his teaching career at the time of independence of Mauritius in the late sixties. He never really chose to become a teacher, but rather explained that: "There was not much work on offer, may be I could have done something else, but I got my certificate and in those days to become a teacher was quite something!" Although Vadivel did not choose to become a teacher, he said that in the past thirty years he has grown accustomed to being one and has also grown to like his teaching job. Vadivel has taught in "all sorts of primary schools" and he is now a general purpose teacher in STD IV in Terre Bleue<sup>79</sup>.

... Things have changed you know! Mauritius has become materialistic! Nowadays with the development we work, everyone works. Twenty years ago, only the head of the family worked, but now, when we started getting the factories now, every one in the families works...Some houses stay closed all day long, everyone is at work! Then in the afternoons, after work, well, everyone is busy they have things to do, they don't have time to visit others, social life does not exist, they don't have time to look after their children! There are some children who never see their parents, day after day, mum and dad go to work early in the morning, when these children wake up the parents are already gone. These children look after themselves or are looked after by an older sister or brother before they go to school. They eat yes, the sister has seen to that! In the evening, the mum does not come home until 6 p.m., she is tired, she has a lot to do, she can't sit down with that child, take interest in his school work, she does not have time! Comes 8 p.m., 9 p.m. every one is tired, they all go to sleep and the next day is the same routine, it starts all over again and again. Well, you see I say that that child is neglected. Sometimes even worse, you know, parents work overtime at the factory, they return home at 10 p.m.! By that time the children are already in bed. The children don't see their mum, they don't see their parents!

... That's the tragedy, the children don't even see their mother! ... These children

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<sup>79</sup> I interviewed Vadivel, on three occasions while his pupils were doing Oriental languages. The interview also took place sitting under the shade of a tree in Terre Bleue.



are neglected, not materially, but they are neglected. Not all children of course, some children are well looked after by their parents, those who come from well-off families are well looked after!

... These parents, they work from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., they have a job that does not eat-up all their time. They have time to look after their children in the morning, often they take them to school, *ils sont bien gâtés et tout!* (they spoil them). In the afternoon, when the child gets back home, the parents are there for them, they sit down with them, talk with them, help them with their homework! *Ces enfants, ils ont tout!* (Those children have everything!), the material side and the affective side. But the other ones, [those whose parents work in the factories] some of them, only eleven, twelve and already they have to look after a little brother, after a little sister. It's not very pleasant for a child of that age! So you see, I say that the system in Mauritius, nobody made it like that, nobody wanted it to be like that, but it's a system that favors an elite! You see brilliant children, but they have to be really brilliant, if even from disadvantaged backgrounds *ils arrivent à percer quand même!* (they manage to break through all the same!). They have to be really brilliant for that though!

... Children, with less capabilities, well those from 'better' backgrounds, with a bit of effort and support from parents, they work more for the exam and at the end of STD VI, that's what happen you see they manage to get a better college. A child *faible* (weak) from a disadvantaged family, he won't get such support and he won't get a good college. With that support, the other child, *il va traverser mieux!* (he is going to come through better!) Let's say [pause] an average child, from a disadvantaged family he is going to be ranked let's say among the first 2000, the same child coming from a more affluent family he will be among the first 1000, *il va traverser mieux!* (He is going to break through better!).

... Education in Mauritius its like that you see, its a system that favours a small group. We don't select this group, we don't say you, go there and you there, no, its done according to the child intellectual capabilities ... an intellectual elite. Up to Standard IV, children go up according to their age. Then from fifth Standard it's according to their performance, their competence, they get sent to STD V A, B, C.

... Some pupils in the lower streams of STD V, they can do some work, but in most cases, *ces enfants-là ne font rien* (these children achieve nothing), and the next year they move to STD VI and they achieve nothing as well. They cannot follow the programme, they cannot cope with the cramming, they become frustrated ... Not only they cannot do anything but comes a time when they don't want to do anything!

... They are given nothing else to do but cramming and they can't do it! Often they are left alone and do absolutely nothing. Its a small group ok, but you see it is in that sense that I say the system is made for the elite, it is geared towards that [other] small group, the good elements, but those who can't do the work, some of them, I am not saying all, but some of them, they face life, they can't even read. I find that really unfair!

... School should teach you *à se débrouiller dans la vie!* (how to face life!) As a teacher I feel responsible, not personally you see these children they haven't been with me all these years, you get them in STD V or VI and its too late! But really we feel responsible, its the teaching profession which is responsible!

... But you see we want to make them all an elite and what is unfortunate is that parents *trempe dans ce bain* (take part in that, they are swallowed by that). They all want their children to be professionals, lawyers, doctors and other white collar jobs. All parents are like that, they have this mentality they want their children to be professionals, *alors ils forcent!* (So they push!) (T12A).

In both schools, most teachers like Vadivel, categorised their pupils as “neglected” or as “well looked after” by their parents. Like Vadivel, most teachers associated the type and amount of care, attention and support they believe pupils should get at home with their family background and incorporated physical as well as psychological aspects to what they consider good care of children. In that regard, teachers in both schools noted that factors such as: “bad nutrition”, “shoddy clothing”, “not having school equipment” such as slates, pencils and rulers, “lack of parental interest in education”, “lack of parental commitment”, “unstable family circumstances” and in some cases “physical abuse”, make it extremely difficult for some pupils to learn and achieve anything at school. As Vadivel, most teachers labelled these pupils “neglected” and attributed their neglect to their “disadvantaged backgrounds” and/or “lower socio-economic backgrounds”. In contrast, most teachers associated “good-care” with “better backgrounds”, “well-off backgrounds”, and with the fact that parents are “more affluent”. The differentiating of parents and of pupils in terms of parental commitment

are topics which will be explained further down in this chapter.

In conversations, as well as in interviews, teachers agreed with parents' view that the three "Rs" are crucial for children to get by in life and generally improve their chance at getting a job. Teachers said that when all pupils "even the low elements" leave school they should have reached a sufficient level of literacy and numeracy so that they can "read their own mail", "read the newspaper", "sign their name", "count their own money" and generally be able to function in life without having to ask other people to do things for them or in their name because they cannot read, write or count. In this regard, Christelle, a STD II teacher in Four Hills for example said : "Its not normal not knowing how to read and write nowadays, thirty, forty years ago it was common but nowadays it should not be the case, you need to read!". Similarly, Nafessa a teacher in Terre Bleue said: "*Sans savoir lire et écrire, c'est difficile de faire face avec [sic] la vie, de faire face avec l'an 2000!* (when unable to read and write, it is difficult to face with [sic] life, to face the year 2000!)" (T3). While Soopaya, a DHT in Four Hills, said that primary education should make it possible later for children " *de se débrouiller dans la vie, de gagner sa vie honnêtement* ( to manage one's life, to earn an honest living)" (T9). Although most teachers deplore the fact that some children (for example Anju in the previous chapter) leave school without having acquired these basic literacy skills, it will be shown later that very few said, like Vadivel, that as teachers they are responsible for the fact that this is happening to certain less able pupils. Similarly, very few said that they tried to do something about it.

In both schools, most teachers said that they view "additional work" as important and beneficial factors for the educational prospects of their pupils. The need for pupils to do

extra work is, according to most teachers, brought about by the fact that there is “too much” for them to teach and “too much” for their pupils to learn. Dyanantee from Terre Bleue explained:

The program is *trop chargé* (too laden) in Mauritius. Often we bring this up, but unfortunately, our voice does not reach up high! It's so laden! They ask us to do everything in primary school! What is going to be left for secondary? What are teachers in secondary going to do if we do everything? Let's take language we do everything grammar, spelling, everything! At college they have nothing to teach them. If a pupil has done a good CPE, teachers have nothing to do up to Form III, pupils, they have learnt it already! They should reduce one quarter they should reduce, keep it for the secondary. They should not put everything on the back of primary schooling! We do everything, everything! We have too much! (T2).

Soopaya, from Four Hills on his part said:

You know the program is really laden (*chargé*). You take Math for example, there are quite a lot of things which, I, myself, learnt in college in Forms I, II, and even III, and these little heads they have to learn all this at primary level! Take this famous EVS for example, which comprises Mauritian history, geography, nutrition, hygiene, sciences, it's really *bourré* (full), and complicated. I say it's too much! We raised the subject at the MIE, asking them if it was possible to modify the program. Anyhow, they didn't, they didn't how could I say this, they didn't put their attention on that (T9).

Having “too much to teach”, believing that their pupils have “too much to learn” together with the fact that “pupils are examined on everything” are the reasons that teachers gave in support of additional work outside the 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. regular school hours. These arguments are encapsulated in the following comments:

*Il y trop à faire, le programme est trop chargé and on n'a pas le temps de faire les choses à fond en classe. A ce moment-là, pendant la leçon, on peut prendre plus son temps pour expliquer les choses davantage. Par exemple si on introduit*

*les fractions en classe on a que 50 minutes pour faire ça. 50 minutes pour expliquer les fractions ne suffisent pas, il faut avoir plus de temps! ... Vu le nombre de leçons qu'on a à expliquer on ne peut pas rester longtemps sur une leçon sinon le programme ne sera pas terminé pour les examens. Or pour les examens, on est examiné sur tous les topiques qu'on a fait, toutes les leçons qu'on a fait depuis la première! ... Jusqu'à la quatrième ça va, mais pour les grandes classes on ne peut pas travailler sans leçons particulières! C'est indispensable! (T6B)*

There is too much to do, the programme is too laden and we don't have time to do things in depth in class. Now, during tuition we can spend more time to explain things better. For example, if we introduce fractions in class, we only have 50 minutes to do so. 50 minutes to explain fractions this is not enough, we need more time! ... When you consider the number of lessons to explain, we can't stay too long on a lesson, if we do we won't finish the programme for the examinations. And for the exams one is examined on all topics all the lessons done since first grade! Up to fourth grade it's ok, but for upper classes we cannot work without extra tuition! It's indispensable!<sup>80</sup>

Most teachers, especially upper-grade teachers like Nafessa, mentioned the pressure of "having to know everything for the examinations" and the impact on their teaching of this pressure. Most teachers like Nafessa stated that additional work is "indispensable" in order to best prepare pupils for examinations and the CPE in particular. Teachers said that parents were aware of this fact. Nafessa, for example, said: "Parents really want their children to pass and they see that what teachers do in class is not sufficient!"(T6B). Yousouf on his part says: "In the mind of parents if the child works from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. he is not going to pass his examination!"(OT4).

Although, like Nafessa, most teachers, like parents earlier, said that additional work is necessary and "indispensable", they also expressed resentment, as the following statements show, about the pressure put on them by parents to provide additional work (both free and paid tuition):

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<sup>80</sup> Extra tuition consists of the private lessons given to upper- grade pupils (STD IV-VI), as a class and for a fee, by their regular class teacher two or three times a week. Lastly, additional work consists of the work done by upper grade pupils, under the supervision of their class teacher, this time unpaid, on school days between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m.

Teachers who do not come early, who do not start work an hour early at 8 a. m., these teachers are accused of being lazy by certain parents (T2).

When teachers don't want to give additional lessons, parents say they are lazy. But some times, teachers have health problems, may be they don't want to tire themselves. Sometimes it happens, they say that they don't want to give [tuition]. In those cases you know, parents do everything they can to have these teachers transferred, parents go to the Ministry and they ask for this teacher's transfer (T6).

With regard to homework, teachers said that they asked their pupils to 'do' exercises in their regular class textbooks and in the additional books, which most of them ask parents to buy<sup>81</sup>. Mokshda, a teacher in a STD V in Terre Bleue, explained:

Parents buy extra books to make their children work. I make them all buy the same books. Otherwise one is going to get it from that author and the other one from that other I think that it is better if all parents buy from the same one. The one they use it's like in our book only a bit more poussé (advanced) and parents can correct it or I can. All parents bought it but I wonder if all use it! ... Some parents are very, very keen but I always tell parents don't go ahead of what we do in class, let us do it in class first then you can do it, otherwise, see children are not going to be interested when we do it in class if they have done it already at home! (R4B).

Like Mokshda and Vadivel, all teachers interviewed believed home work to be necessary in order to repeat and consolidate what has been done in class and all expressed the opinion that parents should make (or even coerce, as the following exemplifies) their children do their homework and encourage additional work.

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<sup>81</sup> These books are subject-based and offer a series of additional exercises for pupils to work at home and also during private tuition. The selling of these books, a very common practice in Terre Bleue and Four Hills is a very lucrative enterprise for their writers. These writers visit teachers in schools or privately and with them work some arrangement that make it beneficial for teachers to recommend these books to their pupils for their parents to buy.

Left to their own devices children will not work. They will play and play and do nothing. So naturally you make it known to the parents, even labourers. You don't ask them to read on the book with them! No, they wouldn't understand a thing! But instead [you ask them] to say to the child: 'Do your homework here and now and then show me when its done!'. So you see, the child would have, how could I say, a certain fear, his dad is checking him- up and he will do the work. And you see this helps the child to make progress! (T9).

In both schools, teachers made a positive correlation between parental involvement/support and their socio-economic position. Sailesh, the head teacher in Four Hills put it this way:

Labourers, fishermen, masons! These people are illiterate people! They are illiterate! How can they motivate their children? ... They go to work early in the morning and they return late in the afternoon. They have no time even to talk to their children. As soon as they return home, they just wash themselves and they go directly to the restaurants to the shops where they drink. When they return they just go to sleep. At times they quarrel with their wives (T11).

Like Sailesh, Jugdish and Vadivel, in both schools, most interviewed teachers said that parents from "lower economic backgrounds" are less likely to provide an educational environment for their children. For example, they claimed that such parents do not buy "reading books" for their children and that they let them watch too much television. Most teachers also said that some of these parents are less likely to value education. In contrast, most teachers said that parents from "well-off backgrounds", "better backgrounds", "affluent families" had more time to give support to their children and "tend to really value education for their children". Teachers said that for these reasons, these parents are more inclined as Vadivel put it; "to sit down with them [their children], talk with them and help them with their homework". Teachers said that these

parents were more likely to provide a “learning environment” for their children, “make their children read books” and also that they “speak to them [their children] in English or French at home”.

Given that parents from “better backgrounds” are perceived as more likely to be interested in their children’s homework, more likely to provide an education conducive environment and given the fact that pupils are less likely to do homework without parental support, most teachers generally linked the educational prospects of their pupils to the socio-economic position of their parents. As Vadivel, most teachers believed that because they do additional work and get the support of their parents, pupils from upper socio economic backgrounds had better chances of “breaking through” while because they are less likely to, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds had less chances to “break through”.

Similarly, like Vadivel, most teachers said that pupils, who in spite of their disadvantaged backgrounds, manage to succeed, have to be very “*doués* (gifted)”, “brilliant”<sup>82</sup>. For Vadivel and most teachers “*traverser* (break through)” in most cases meant ranking at the CPE examination and securing a place in a “good college”. These topics will be presented in detail further in the chapter.

In both schools, most teachers were like Vadivel, of the opinion that the system accommodates/favours what they commonly called the “intellectual elite”, “the good elements”<sup>83</sup>, adding “the system is made like that, we can’t change it”. Soraya, now teaching in STD IV in Four Hills, recalled that, when, as a beginning teacher and in

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<sup>82</sup> Many teachers like to tell of isolated cases which show that it is possible.

<sup>83</sup> Pupils in this category are able to cope with the type and amount of work demanded of them.



another school, she expressed the view that perhaps she "shouldn't go so fast because some children couldn't follow" she was told by her HT: "Don't waste your time with *katars!* (bad/lazy pupils!)" . Most teachers said that they did not like it when they have to teach less able pupils they said "*Ces enfants-là, ils ne peuvent pas assimiler!* (These pupils, they cannot assimilate!"). Solange who is teaching in a "repeaters" class in Four Hills put it this way:

*... ils n'arrivent pas à retenir, surtout dans une classe comme la mienne. Vous dites ça aujourd'hui, vous le répétez une semaine, mais après à la fin du mois quand vous retournez là- dessus, ils ont fini d'oublier[sic], parce qu'ils ont trop à retenir comme si!* (T6)

... they can't memorize, especially in a class like mine. You say something one day, you repeat it for a week but at the end of the month when you come back to it, they have finish to forget it [sic] because as if there is too much to memorise!

Like Solange, most teachers blamed the poor educational accomplishments of less able pupils on their inability to retain what has been taught them in class and complained that there is "too much to assimilate for these children". Most teachers however said: "*Qu'est ce que vous voulez qu'on y fasse!* (What can we do about it!)" . Vadivel is in that sense very much an exception when he openly admitted "responsibility" for students learning.

Prem, now teaching STD V in Four Hills, is one teacher who said that he tried to "do something different for low elements". Some years back in another school, he recalled taking charge of a STD VI class of 'very low element' and said about them: "These children you could give them five more years they were not going to pass the CPE!". Prem decided to teach the "STD II programme" so that his pupils could acquire some

Prem decided to teach the "STD II programme" so that his pupils could acquire some basic reading and writing skills. In addition, because, his pupils "could not write all day long". Prem decided to engage them in "practical, useful things like drawing, making baskets". Prem said that he had to secure permission from his head teacher who in turn had to secure permission from the inspector in order to make these changes. Prem said:

Officially, we don't do this. We can't do it. I got permission. If the maître [HT] had said no, it was no and he could only say yes if the inspector said yes ... It's like this. I got permission from the maître and from the inspector. The kids couldn't do a thing, so they said yes (T5).

Among the teachers of Terre Bleue and Four Hills, Prem is the only teacher who specifically mentioned an attempt to attend to the needs of less able pupils. In contrast most teachers blamed their pupils' poor retention skills and their difficult background as well as a system and people that favour an "*intellectual elite*". The comments, made by Darma, school secretary in Four Hills, showed that teachers, at least in that school, are supported in what may be labelled their fatalistic attitude towards the chances of less able pupils.

*Les profs d'après moi ils ne sont pas à bâmer! Ils ont un programme mais si l'enfant ne peut pas assumer le programme il est foutu! (T12B).*

Teachers according to me you can't blame them! They have their programme and if the kid can't assume the programme he's had it!

## Summary

Vadivel's words have introduced and illustrated most of the issues articulated by teachers of both Terre Bleue and Four Hills. Like Vadivel, most teachers who

participated in the research considered reading, writing and counting as crucial skills to get by in life. They contended that the need for additional work is brought about by the fact that there is "too much to teach" and "too much to learn" and by the fact that "everything since year one has to be known for the examinations". For these reasons, teachers said that they value additional work because it consolidates what is done in class, compensates for what cannot be done in class and consolidates preparation for examination. Teachers said that for these reasons, they considered additional work (homework and private tuition) as necessary and indispensable. Although teachers agree with the necessity of additional work, they also said that they resented the pressure parents, determined to have their children pass the exam, put on them to provide additional work (the paid and unpaid kind).

Most teachers said that they valued parental support in making pupils work extra and providing their children with an educationally conducive environment. Most also said that they regret that not all parents do so. Most teachers were of the opinion that parental support is linked to socio-economic background and, as a result, associated pupils' present and prospective educational success to their socio economic backgrounds.

Most teachers deplored the poor educational accomplishment of less able pupils for which they blamed the pupils' poor retention ability, the lack of support from their parents and the system in which everything in the programme has to be assimilated. All, except one teacher, in the research, did not attribute any responsibility for the poor educational accomplishment of less able pupils on themselves. One teacher recalled an exceptional case at attempting to attend to the needs of less able pupils. Most teachers

on the other hand came to the conclusion that the system favoured an "intellectual elite" and most felt powerless with regard to the poor educational accomplishments of less able pupils.

The following example has been chosen because it introduces and illustrates several of the issues articulated by other pupils. More specifically, this example introduces issues voiced by pupils who, like Bala, are 'repeaters'. Supporting the comments made by Devika and Vadivel, Bala's comments expand on remarks previously made as well as introduce new issues.

### **Bala**

Bala is twelve years old. He is a pupil in Solange's STD VI D in Four Hills where he sits at the back of the class. Last year, Bala failed to pass the CPE examination and will try again this year. He is labelled as a 'repeater'.

Bala said that he spends most of his day in class, playing and talking with his friends and that he has done so throughout most of his primary schooling. He said that he and his friends talk and play when Miss has her back turned or when she is looking the other way. They talk about what they are going to do during the next break, about what they did the previous night. Bala describes his work in class with the following words:

*Je suive un peu, je fais un effort pour travail quand mes amis me repondent pas  
Mais je sais pas moi comment écrire moi tout ça, j'sais pas lire l'anglais, le  
français un peu. J'ai peur quand je lis comme ça, j'ai peur quand je fais pas bon.  
Miss a pince la joue quand on fait pas les devoirs, mais y'a trop beaucoup! Moi je  
donne pas mes cahiers à Miss à corriger, j'ai peur Miss regarde tout ça! ... Des  
fois quand je fais des choses bons, Miss a si contente! (E1)*

I follows a bit, I make an effort with work when my friends do not answer me. But, me, I don't know how to write and do all this, I don't know how to read English. French I can a bit. I am scared when I read and things like that, I am scared I don't do it good. Miss, she pinches cheeks when we don't do our work, but there is too much plenty, I don't give my book to Miss for marking, I am scared for her to look at it. . . . Sometimes, when I do things good, Miss er so happy!

This year is Bala's last chance to pass the CPE examination<sup>84</sup>. He said:

*J'ai peur parce que c'est mon dernière année, j'ai peur de faire pareil. . . j'ai pas travaillé trop beaucoup! Maintenant je dois faire un effort pour la CPE, apprendre tous les jours tout ça, bien écouter Miss, mais je joue trop beaucoup! . . . Quand j'ai là à l'examen [l'année dernière] j'ai pris des chewing gums, des bonbons tout ça et puis je parlais avec mes amis pendant l'examen parc'que c'est mon dernier jour avec mes amis. J'ai fait fail pour tout. Cette année je doit passer la CPE pac'que quand je venir grand je finis d'apprendre, avec (le CPE), je vais avoir une place de travail (E1).*

I am scared because its my last year, I am scared of doing the same. . . . I did not work too much plenty! Now I must do an effort for the CPE, learn every day, all that, listen to Miss well, but I play too much plenty! . . . . When I am there at the exam [last year] I took some chewing gums, some sweets all that, and I talked with my friends during the exam because it's my last day with my friends. I did fail for everything. This year I musts pass the CPE 'cause when I to become grow-up I finish learning, with [the CPE], I will get a job.

Bala's mother is a domestic servant and his twenty three-year old brother is a kitchen hand in a restaurant. They have told him that he must succeed this year and have promised him a *mobylette* (moped) if he succeeds. Bala says that when he is around, his brother, who managed to pass the CPE, beats Bala when he plays instead of doing his homework and also because he does not read well. "*Je fais pas beaucoup mes devoirs* (I don't do much homework)" says Bala. Most evenings Bala goes to a club in his neighbourhood to play snooker. He said that he likes very much playing snooker and

<sup>84</sup> Pupils have to leave primary schol when they turn 13 years of age.

also watching cartoons, Indian films and Thalassa, a documentary about the sea on television.

In both Terre Bleue and Four Hills schools, most pupils (able and less able pupils and upper and lower-grade pupils) like Bala, said that school is a place in which they have friends or a place where they can make friends. In the stories, for example, pupils use friendship as an argument when they try to persuade a smaller sibling to go to school. They write: "You have to go to school to make friends!" (St 7, St 3 and St 9), "Little by little you'll make friends!" (St 8), "You will make friends and become inseparables" (St 3) and to the child not wanting to go to school because he wonders if he will have any friends one writer says, "Of course you will have many friends!" (St10).

Many repeaters, like Bala, (but not all as will be explained later) claim that "playing" and "messaging around" with their friends in class comes in the way of school work and blame their poor performance on the fact that they do so and spend their time playing rather than working. Pupils other than 'repeaters' have not made similar comments. Pictorial data, as mentioned earlier, gives no representation of pupils' interactions in class. Interactions between pupils in the play- ground on the other hand are present in many drawings.

Data collected from conversation and stories also indicated that, to varying degrees, most pupils, like Bala, experience some kind of anxiety/apprehensiveness. Bala is afraid of not getting his work right, afraid of Miss and his brother and afraid of failing a second time at the CPE examination. In the stories written by pupils, "being afraid of

teachers" is one of the common arguments utilised by 'little brother or sister' for not wanting to go to school. In most of these imaginary dialogues, younger children were made to say: "I am scared of the teacher", "I am too scared because of the prof", "Teacher will beat me". Conversational data shows that although most pupils are anxious about getting their work "right", it is only less able pupils like Bala, who mentioned avoiding giving their work to teacher to mark for this reason.

Anxiety about the exams and the CPE and having to 'work hard and much' in order to pass exams are on the other hand, issues mentioned by most upper-grades pupils in both schools. Bala, and most 'repeaters' said they experienced anxiety because this year was their last chance for passing the CPE. Other examples in this chapter will show additional reasons for being anxious about the CPE and show that repeaters were not the only people experiencing such 'anxiety'. How pupils, parents and teachers associated the notion of 'much work' with the potential of success at CPE will be explored further in this chapter.

In informal conversations with upper-grade pupils in Terre Bleue and Four Hills, most of the pupils, who like Bala are categorised as "repeaters", said that they "had to pass" the CPE in order to go to college and later "get a good job". None could predict about what kind of job the CPE would enable them to do and none knew what they wanted to do when they grew up.

### **Summary**

Bala's example has introduced and illustrated several of the issues articulated by pupils of both Terre Bleue and Four Hills schools. Like Bala, most pupils (able and less able

pupils as well as upper and lower-grades pupils) perceived school as a place where they have and make friends; they are fearful of teachers' discipline and they experience anxiety about getting their work right. Like Bala, most upper grade pupils claimed anxiety about the CPE examination, believed that they had to work hard and much in order to pass this examination, while most associated the CPE with their educational and occupational prospects. Furthermore, pupils who like Bala are "repeaters" said that they experienced anxiety because their work is not right and for this reason, and in contrast with other pupils, avoided giving their work to their teachers for marking. These pupils also said that they experienced anxiety because it is their last chance for passing the CPE. They indicated that they had to pass the CPE in order to go to college and in order to get a job. In contrast with others, pupils labelled as repeaters did not indicate the kind of job they aspired to do when they grow up.

The following examples of Kiran, Victoria, Tara and Ariff, cast additional light on the association pupils make between the CPE and their educational and occupational prospects. The combined stories of these pupils illustrate the views of most upper grade pupils with the exception of less able pupils like Bala. Like earlier, comments made in the following examples support and expand on comments previously made as well as introduce new issues

#### **Kiran, Victoria, Tara and Ariff**

Kiran is eleven years old and categorised as a 'good element' pupil in STD VI A in Four Hills. Kiran's parents are pharmacists. The following is an extract of Kiran's story, in which she recounted an imaginary dialogue between her mother and her five-year old



sister Rita. In the story Kiran's mother tries to convince Rita who went to go to school for the first time the previous day and does not want to go again why she should do so.

**Rita:** Please mum, I don't want to go to school!

**Mother:** But why Rita?

**Rita:** Because it is too tiresome!

**Mother:** No it is not too tiresome. You should go to school. It is very important.

**Rita:** Why is it important to go to school?

**Mother:** To learn good manners, to have good friends, to learn how to write and to study.

**Rita:** Why is it important to study hard?

**Mother:** So that you can pass your exams and go to a good college.

**Rita:** But why should I have a good college?

**Mother:** To get to a good university in your own country or abroad and to get a good job like doctor, lawyer or judge.

**Rita:** Why should we have a good job?

**Mother:** To get money and you can buy the things you need.

**Rita:** Oh! Now I understand! Tomorrow I'll go to school again! (St9).

Victoria and Tara are eleven years old and like Bala are categorised as 'repeaters'. In contrast with Bala however, they sat in the front row in Solange's class in Four Hills. Victoria and Tara were two of the six pupils in that class who are repeating STD VI, despite the fact that they have passed the CPE the previous year. Their marks included As, Bs and Cs and nothing under. Both said they were repeating because they did not manage to be *classées* (ranked) at CPE last year. Both said that they are aiming to do so

this year. For these reasons and despite the fact that they are also categorised as "repeaters" Victoria and Tara have different aspirations from those of Bala.

Victoria's parents work in a snack restaurant. Victoria says that she wants to become a lawyer. Her parents have promised her a trip to South Africa if she succeeds at being '*classée* (ranked)'. Tara's father on the other hand is a stone mason and her mother does not work. Tara said that she wants to become a teacher. Her parents have promised her a bicycle if she is '*classée* (ranked)'.

Ariff is also eleven years old and like Victoria and Tara, a 'repeater' who has passed CPE the previous year, with As, Bs and Cs. Like them, Ariff is aiming at being "*classé* (ranked)" on his second attempt. Ariff sat at the front of the class in Sarojni's class. His father is a clerk in a government office and his mother works in a supermarket. He said that he wanted to become a doctor and that his parents will buy him a computer if he is '*classé* (ranked)'.

Kiran, Victoria, Tara and Ariff said that they have to work hard to be "*classés* (ranked)" in order to get admitted into a '*good college*'. As most other pupils in Terre Bleue and Four Hills, they identified these colleges by name when asked what they meant by "good college": "Queen Elisabeth Rose Hill, Royal College Curepipe, Loreto College, St Esprit". Kiran and Victoria said that they had an older sister and brother in one of these colleges.

Kiran's story supports several of the points made earlier. Kiran tells her little sister that going to school is important in order to "have good friends" and in order to "learn how

to read and write". It is so also when she indicates that "study hard" will make her "pass the exam" and similarly associates passing the exam with having "a good job".

However, her story, together with Victoria's, Tara's and Ariff's comments, introduces aspirations of a different type and it is necessary to return to Vadivel's comments in order to elaborate these aspirations.

In his account, Vadivel arranged pupils in three groups: a small group comprising "faibles (weak)" less able pupils like Bala and Anju, another small group of pupils which Vadivel and other teachers categorised as an 'intellectual elite', and a third group, the majority group comprising the rest of pupils. Kiran, as a pupil in STD VI A in Four Hills, belonged to that small group of pupils which Vavidel and other teachers labelled 'intellectual elite'. Victoria, Tara and Ariff, on their part, belonged to what Vavidel described as the majority group but were showing by their actions that they were trying to join the "intellectual elite" group.

Despite their distinct grouping and labelling, Kiran, Victoria, Tara and Ariff aspired to the same thing, to be "*classé(e)s au CPE* (ranked at CPE)" in order to secure a "good college". Wanting to "rank at CPE in order to secure a good college" was the ambition of most upper-grade pupils in Four Hills and Terre Bleue. It is what most upper-grade pupils said they work for. Similarly, it is what most interviewed parents, whether their children were in low grades or upper grades and whether they were schooling in Four Hills or Terre Bleue, said they aspired for their children. It is also what all interviewed teachers said they wished for the pupils they believed able to do so. Bipin, a pupil in STD V B in Four Hills said:

*Je dois apprend très dur pour aller dans Royal Curepipe. A la fin de mes examens je dois trouver mon nom dans le journal et mes parents vont être contents de moi!* (St 13).

I must learn [sic] very hard to go to Royal Curepipe [Royal College in Curepipe]. When the exam is finished I must find my name in the newspaper and my parents will be pleased with me!<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, when asked what his wishes were for his pupils, Sailesh the head teacher in Four Hills said: "For them to join the best colleges in Mauritius" (T11).

Wanting to get a 'good job', a topic introduced in previous cases, is also a wish expressed by most upper grade pupils. Victoria wanted to be a lawyer, Tara wanted to be a teacher, Ariff wanted to become a doctor. In contrast with Bala, Kiran, Victoria, Tara, Ariff and most other upper grade pupils said that they have 'professional' ambitions. Vavidel earlier construed this ambition as parental "mentality" which Kiran's story illustrates. In that story, when Rita queries her mother, asking why she should go to a "good college" Kiran made the mother say: "... To get to a good university in your country or abroad and to get a good job like doctor, lawyer or judge...To get money and you can buy the things you need " (St9). Most teachers who are also parents were in empathy with this "mentality". An example is that of Renu, a lower grade teacher in Four Hills who said: "I want my children to reach *plus haut que moi* (higher than me), you don't get enough as a teacher, I want them to earn more, I want them to get good jobs like doctor or lawyer!"(T7). Reasons for wanting to school in a "good college" will be explained in greater details in the next participant case.

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<sup>85</sup> The list of ranked pupils is published every year in the Mauritian newspapers.

## **Summary**

Kiran, Victoria, Tara and Ariff's comments support several of the points made by Devika, Vadivel and Bala. They saw school as a place where they can have friends, an important place where to learn how to read and write and a place where they have to work much and hard in order to succeed. Moreover, their comments have illustrated that wanting to "rank at CPE in order to get admission in a good college" was the prevalent ambition of most upper grade pupils in Four Hills and Terre Bleue, an ambition they shared with most interviewed parents and teachers. Their comments have also illustrated that upper grade pupils had a professional ambitions that coincided with those expressed by most interviewed parents.

The following example of Philip and Lalita further highlights parents' experiencing and understanding of primary education which has been introduced earlier by Devika. More specifically, Lalita's and Philip's comments shed additional light on the dominant aspiration, of "wanting to rank in order to secure a good college". Philip and Lalita's words illustrate what sustains this ambition as well as what this ambition entails for parents and pupils. Their comments support and expand on previous comments as well as introduce new issues.

### **Philip and Lalita**

Philip and Lalita, a couple in their early thirties, have an only daughter Anabelle who is a STD VI A pupil in Four Hills. Both Philip and Lalita are professionals who, through their hard work and perseverance, have escaped their humble beginnings.

Philip, the last of a family of five children, lost his mother, who was a school teacher, in the first few years of his primary schooling. He talked about his childhood as unhappy, full of problems and very disciplined. He says: "In those days we were scared *de prendre une raclée le lendemain* (to get a beating the next day) if we did not do our homework!" (P1).

Philip said that he worked very hard throughout his whole schooling. His 'chance' came in Standard V when he became the pupil of a "*faiseuse de boursier*"<sup>86</sup>. Because he worked well and also because he had family difficulties, this teacher invited him to attend her private tuition classes free of charge. With her technique and support of members of his extended family, some of whom were also teachers, Philip said that he "*a décroché* (got hold of)" a scholarship for which there was fierce competition, managed to get himself through secondary education and later secured "a good government job".

Lalita also worked very hard throughout her schooling because she knew that her parents could not afford private tuition. She also knew that she had to work hard in order to get a scholarship to pay for the "*écolage* (school fees)" for secondary schooling which her parents could not afford. Her own parents never went to school and did not know how to read and write. They were very poor with a family of six children to bring up. Lalita said that she grew with "this mentality of wanting to improve my lot". She casually mentioned that she was the only one in her class who has been able to "*traverser* (break through)" in spite of not taking private tuition. Through her determination and hard work she, like Philip, gained a scholarship which enabled her to

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<sup>86</sup> *Faiseuse de boursier* translate as maker of scholarship laureates. Such people are described as having specific work methods which year after year make pupils succeed at exams. These methods generally consist of drilling pupils with past exam papers, taking pupils through the various processes they need to consider in order to answer correctly to "rank" at CPE.

complete her secondary education and later obtained a law degree. She now has a professional occupation.

Their daughter, Anabelle, was a pupil in STD VI A in Four Hills where she prepared for the CPE examination. She is a 'good element' in the sense described in the previous chapter. In spite of the fact that she and her parents have not lived in Four Hills' catchment area since Anabelle was in STD IV, her parents have managed to keep her in that school for the remaining two years of her primary schooling. They decided to do so, because Annabelle was "used to her environment" and because Four Hills is perceived by them as a far "better school" than the school she should attend near home. Philip's mother lives in the catchment area and this fact has been utilised to their advantage.

Philip, Lalita and Anabelle said they leave home together at around 6 a.m. every working morning. Annabelle was the first one to be dropped at her grand mother's place. The grandmother prepared her for school, her lunch, and "*fait le chouchou* (pamper)". Lalita explained that such early start is due to the fact that Philip, who had to be at work very early, wanted to provide transport for her and Annabelle before he started his own day's work. From her grand mother's place and at the appropriate times, Anabelle's journeys to and from Four Hills were done by van. Philip and Lalita picked Annabelle from her grand mother's place at around 5 p.m. on "non-lessons days" and 5.30 in the afternoon on "lesson days". During the week, the best part of Anabelle's evenings were spent doing homework on average until about 9 p.m., with half an hour time off for the evening meal.

In the following statement Lalita and Philip communicated how they experienced and understood their daughter's primary education.

**Lalita:** Once at home, usually it's Philip who looks after her homework because I go directly to the kitchen to prepare something to eat. But on the other hand, when she is in her bedroom, not far from the kitchen, sometimes she shouts: Can you tell me what this is? So I help. Sometimes, I, it's my way, if she makes a mistake, she has mis-interpreted a sentence, I say to her jokingly: Are you sure? How does this look like? She laughs. But it depends on my mood, you see, sometimes I get very angry when she makes *une faute bête* (a silly mistake). The good thing with Annabelle is that, *elle raisonne!* (thinks/reflects!) Usually she does not ask for help unless she really does not know. She gets on with her homework and we help her only with little things. When she asks, if we see that she can do the work we say: 'Get on with it, do it as you think it should be done, we will come and correct later'. But you know I noticed that the same exercises keep coming back. In each chapter there is this sort of repetition, even if it's not quite like when we were repeating in our days [rote learning], I think that this is the idea, to repeat the same thing without having to say to the child: 'Repeat after me!' I think repetition is in her books. That's why I tell my little girl when she asks questions: 'Remember! You have asked me this already! You already have done this! Repeating you see, it's practice. *Il faut forger pour être forgeron!* (practice makes perfect), that's how it is!

**Philip:** You see we don't want to put pressure on. If she makes *des fautes d'innatention* (careless errors,) especially in languages, for example she is conjugating a verb at the second person and forgets to write the s<sup>87</sup>, I say to her: 'Have you eaten the s?' She says what s? I say: 'can't you see that an s is missing here? It's a game see! But at the same time control is strict you see. What I do at weekends for example, if I know that there was not too much pressure during the week at school and, that she does not have too much homework, I look for a paper [mock exam paper] in her books, those books with papers from previous years. I do this, so that she can practise.

**Lalita:** We don't do this all the time! ... If she has free time we let her have free time. On weekends for example, we let her watch the programmes she likes to watch on TV. Take last Friday for example, she started to do her homework. I said to her Why this rush, you have the whole day, Saturday! She said: 'No, because Saturday there is a long programme I want to watch. So she did her homework until 10 p.m.! ...Sunday is free and nowadays she reads a lot French and English books. She shows some interest, but you know, we have to push her because there are too many distractions. Honestly, programmes on TV all day long just as in Europe nowadays! It's a distraction, they want to watch. When it goes on [the watching of TV] for too long, I turn the TV off and I say: 'Finish your homework! You'll watch it another day!'

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<sup>87</sup> The reported conversation between Shamlesh and Rama in the previous chapter similarly makes mention of a missing *s* at the second person of present tense in conjugating French verbs. In English grammar, this could be likened to keeping forgetting to add the *s* when saying or writing she /he eats.



I have friends telling me that they give extra work to their child. One of them was correcting homework in the bus and someone said [to her]: 'Are you un professeur? (a teacher?)'. You see she was giving this work to push her child for CPE. Some parents do that, but I am against this because, you have to think of the child, you see, myself and I am an adult, come 2 in the afternoon, I don't like to do much, I busy myself yes, I do little things, but to concentrate, to start something new at that time, I must say, no I don't! You see school already starts at 8 a.m. and then three times a week they have lessons until 5 p.m., then the children go home to do their school work. Some parents stay until midnight with their children for homework you know! Most of her [Anabelle's] friends take an additional two lessons but, myself, I don't think it's necessary because we are here to help her. Teachers ask, no later than yesterday, a teacher phoned her and said: 'Si tu veux un jour aller prendre! (if you want to take lessons one day!)'. I said to her: It's not a question of wanting or not, if you see that it will be beneficial for you to take a lesson take it Saturdays, for let's say an hour, just before the exam! But to take it always, every Saturday, no that's *tuant*! (killing) I think this is really *tuant* for the child!

**Lalita:** ... Last year we have had *un drame* (dramatic/emotional incident) you see, at the end of 5th year, she got a B for EVS. This was very traumatic for her, she cried all the way from school. She refused to eat etc. You see what happened is that she took it another way, she did not agree, she was saying that her marks had been wrongly added up. A ten year old, to act like this, it's incredible! My sister in law who works at X [in the education field] had to explain to her what a B meant: that teachers were a little severe in marking, that it was to make children work a bit harder, that it did not mean that you have failed this subject, but that well, that you have to do better, that it was not *un drame* (the end of the earth!). I was really upset I can tell you. I thought, ok, this time, she probably think 'I must do better', but it was so traumatic, I got quite scared! The fact that someone else had to talk to her to make her understand! That she did not want to eat, to sleep! In the end, she went to sleep at mid-day! That's the system you see, I think this is due to the system, children get caught in competition!

**Philip:** ... [this year] In all her *interrogations* (tests) she got 50 out of 50, but you know I don't want to give her false confidence! All we want is for her to maintain good marks until the end of the year [for CPE] that's all we ask of her! I never ask her to be first in class, it's enough if she is among the first ten, *ça me suffit!* (it's enough!). She brings us a 90% average and it's ok!

**Lalita:** Yea that's it! The only thing we want Annabelle [pause] Annabelle works for 90% and this is enough for us. We don't want her to do cramming to become first, no, no! The important thing is that she knows all her subjects [pause] That's where I see a good result, 90%!

**Philip:** 90 plus

**Lalita:** At 90 plus, let's say, she can simply have a good college. I do not aim for Queen Elizabeth College where all the best girls go! I say that there are other

schools, *écoles confessionnelles* (religious schools) which are good. These schools take pupils ranked among the first 2000. With 90% average you rank among the first 2500. That would satisfy me!

**Philip:** You know the difference in points between the first and the 1000th is very small!

**Lalita:** Yes the margin is very minimal. The important thing is that Annabelle passes this exam, not to be among the first 100, I don't mind if she is 400, 500. The main thing is that she gets a good college. If she doesn't [pause] well, she will have to repeat to get a good college. Up to now, we can say that Annabelle always has had her 90% in all subjects. Even with the "B" [my emphasis] she got last year you know, you get 85%. Even with a B you can pass the CPE! So we do not dramatise things. Even if we can't say it aloud, we have confidence in her, in her ability. We know what she is worth, what she can do. We always say to her try to work for 100% marks! Because you see I think that when it comes to exams you capacities diminish. We don't have 100% capacity at exams! You are stressed, you have to do the papers in a limited time etc., Your capacities diminish. Working for 100% marks can lead you to a 90% result. It's the only way for pupils, work hard, sustain the effort all throughout the year, work 100% all throughout the year and then with 90% results you can make it! (P1).

Philip and Lalita's understanding of Annabelle's primary education is embedded in their own experience of primary education which, like Devika earlier, they described as difficult especially in economic terms. As parents described by teachers earlier as "supportive parents", Philip and Lalita viewed their support as important and beneficial factors for their daughter's educational prospects and for this reason they provide an education-conducive environment for their daughter. In contrast with Bala and because of her parents' support, Annabelle for example did not watch too much television, was provided with books in English and French to read on Sunday. Her homework was supervised and she was given additional work in the form of past examination papers in order to prepare herself for the CPE.

It has been shown in previous examples that wanting to 'secure a rank at the CPE examination in order to secure admission in a good college' was the goal that most

upper grade pupils said they worked towards, the ambition most parents, not just those who, as Lalita and Philip, had a child in STD VI, said they have for their children and what most teachers wish for the pupils they believe are able to do so. Lalita and Philip's comments casts more light on the nature of that ambition and on what, as most parents, they believe are the requirements to achieve that ambition.

Lalita and Philip worked hard through their primary schooling and as a result won scholarships (Junior Scholarship) which enabled them to pay for their secondary education fees in a "top Confessional School" for Lalita and a "good State College" for Philip<sup>88</sup>. Anabelle and other secondary education aspirants, now that secondary education is free, do not need a scholarship in order to go to college. However, like her parents, Anabelle needed to work hard in order to, like them, get into a 'good college'. The following presents what parents saw as a 'good college' and what made these colleges desirable. It also indicates the amount and type of hard work which parents thought necessary in order to rank at CPE and hence secure admission in 'good colleges'.

In her interview, Lalita said: "I do not aim for Queen Elizabeth College where all the best girls go, I say that there are other schools *écoles confessionnelles* which are good. The main thing is that she gets a good college"<sup>89</sup>(P1). All interviewed parents, as Lalita and Philip, want their child to secure admission in a college to which they affix the

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<sup>88</sup> Rather than in one of those private colleges of 'uneven standing' that mushroomed in Mauritius at that time (see Chapter 5 for an explanation of the secondary system in place during that time).

<sup>89</sup> In 1996 secondary education was provided in 130 schools in Mauritius (MEPD, 1997c). In that year 25,629 pupils were examined at the CPE. 16,737 passed and 5,698 among these 16,737 pupils were ranked (MEPD, 1997a). Their various ranks gave them admission in 1997 in one of the 71 secondary colleges which take ranked pupils. These 71 secondary colleges are considered as "good colleges". Among them, approximately 1/3 are considered very good and a handful are very high demand schools (MES, 1997c). The remaining 11,039 pupils school in the remainder 59 secondary schools, 23 of which have been described earlier as "sub-standard".

qualifier “good”. Like Lalita and Philip, most interviewed parents said that: “getting a good college is the main thing” the “most important thing”. Several of these parents said that that was what they wanted “à tout prix (at all cost)” and several, like Lalita, said that their children would repeat STD VI to try again if they do not succeed doing so.

Interviewed parents like Lalita as well as upper grade pupils, identified several colleges when asked what was meant by “good college”:

You have those with good reputation Queen Elizabeth, Royal Colleges, these colleges we say are very very good. The confessional colleges some of them are also very good, the Loreto colleges for example, they are very good. And then you have the others, some of them are really bad you know. We don't want our children to go in those! (P1).

Some parents believed that these colleges were *good* because they had “better teachers” but did not specify in what way these teachers were “better” than those other colleges. Some parents also suggested that these colleges are *good* because they are “better resourced (*sont mieux équipés*) than other colleges”. Other parents believed that these colleges “are better colleges because they have the intellectual elite”. Some parents stated that these colleges are good because: “Pupils who got the best marks at CPE go to them”, “They [the good colleges] have the best pupils”. In addition, most parents noted that students who go to university have good results at HSC, and noted that these students originated from “good colleges”. Similarly, most parents noted that students who win scholarships come from “good colleges”, and as this parent some said that “children able to study [because of scholarships] in the best universities in Europe, in India come from good colleges”. This parent says: “We need our children to get to these colleges because in these colleges they have a better chance de *gagner* (win) a

scholarship to study abroad", "How can we afford University education abroad!" (R8). Several parents and teachers gave examples of friends and family members who had to sell their house in order to pay for their child's tertiary studies abroad. Several declared having to do more than one job in order to do so. Fon Yin, an upper grade teacher in Four Hills, for example, said that in order to support his daughter's university studies in South Africa, he had to spend most of his free time giving private tuition. He also said that it is for this reason that he drove an old moped rather than the car he could afford with his giving so much tuition<sup>90</sup> (FB/U pp.50-59).

Hard and much work is mentioned as an important issue for parents. Lalita who says that to succeed Anabelle needs to "work hard, sustain the effort all throughout the year" reflected parents' conviction in that regard. During a conversation with a group of parents in Terre Bleue one father put it this way: "*Plus on travaille plus on a sa chance* (The more you work the better your chance)" (R8). For this reason, like Philip and Lalita, most parents organised additional work for their children. Like Philip, some parents said that they made their children practise mock exam papers, other parents said that they sit and work with their children every night and at weekends and did so using the exercises from the extra books recommended by teachers or private tutors. Some parents also said that they bought additional books in shops while other parents said that they send their children, after school, or during the week-end, for additional tuition<sup>91</sup>.

Philip and Lalita calculated that Anabelle needed an average of 90% in all subjects in order to achieve this goal but added that they wanted her to work for a 100% marks to

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<sup>90</sup> Fon Yin's daughter did not manage to secure admission in the University of Mauritius where education is free nor did she manage to get a scholarship from the various countries and organisations offering them to support tertiary education abroad.

<sup>91</sup> In addition to the private tuition given in class by regular teacher.

allow for the "loss of capacities" one is said to experience during examination. Their comments exemplified the wish of many parents, that of securing straight A's in all subjects. Some like Philip and Lalita rationalised this wish. Most parents on the other hand said that what they wanted and asked for were "straight A's", a demand about which, Dyamantee makes the following comments:

The only thing parents are interested in are results. They expect good results at the end of the year. A child could have three A and one B, parents are not satisfied with this B. This B may be on border line as we say, but the parent is not satisfied. We try to make them understand, but the thing is, parents don't accept *le niveau de leur enfant!* (the capacity level of their child!) (T6).

Anabelle's reported reaction to the fact that she got a B is a clear indication that the high achievement standards expected from pupils are sources of anxiety for the pupils as well as their parents. Teachers speaking in their quality of parents have mentioned this anxiety. Yousouf, an oriental languages teacher in Four Hills schools, for example said:

The CPE examination you know, it's much more than an examination! I can't describe that CPE! You have your son, your daughter sitting for CPE examination its crazy! You don't sleep yourself! You have to imagine the small child who has to sit for the CPE examination and the father tells him, You have to bring me good results, and the mother tells him the same and the teacher also! (OT4).

Christelle said:

Ayo! This CPE, I really don't know, every one wants to be the best, best, best. We push these children to get a ranking then when you look at these children three years later, some of those who came up 9th 10th among 5000, some of them often they don't work anymore in class, you know! Like the son of that TV personality, now he is at Brown Sequard<sup>92</sup>! They pushed him too much. The kid got tired. Now his head is not right, his head is tired. This happens you know! The parents are stressed, the kids are stressed! These children they do not live their lives as

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<sup>92</sup> Psychiatric Hospital in Port Louis.

children as I did when I was at primary school! In my days we had time to play after school as I did, play hide and seek, pick goyavas. They don't do this anymore! (T3).

Like Lalita, most parents imputed responsibility on the system. Mokshda put it this way:

You see this CPE it's government policy as we say. As long as the government does not decide to change, what can we do! As long as it is there we always will have the same problems! (R4B).

### Summary

Like the views of pupils and teachers discussed in previous examples, especially those in upper grades, most parents' understandings of primary education is conditioned by the presence and requirements of the CPE examination in the near future. Parents want their children to rank at the CPE examination in order to secure admission in what they perceive as a good college. For this reason, most parents, like Philip and Lalita, agreed with teachers' opinions that pupils need to assimilate the information on which they are going to be examined at CPE. Like them they saw much, hard and additional work as providing their children with the means to assimilate this information and to attain the goal they have set for them that of ranking in order to secure a good college. Parents saw these colleges as having better teachers and pupils and as being better resourced. They also viewed schooling in these colleges as enabling their children to get good results at HSC which in turn would enable their children to get admitted into the Mauritius University and/or win scholarships to study abroad. They noted the anxiety and the requirements, such as much work and consistent good marks needed for ranking at the CPE, brought upon their children and themselves and like teachers earlier, blamed "the system" for this happening.

The following examples illustrate what research participants other than pupils, parents and teachers construed as the dominant issues of Mauritian primary education. As explained earlier, the educationists' voices reflect a broader Mauritian understanding of the present circumstances and issues of Mauritian primary education. These examples introduce and illustrate what educationists construe as the dominant issues in Mauritian primary education. The comments made in these examples support and expand on comments made by people previously as well as raise new issues.

### **Educationists' voices <sup>93</sup>**

#### **Noor**

Noor did his primary and secondary schooling in Mauritius and went to Europe for his tertiary studies. His occupation which cannot be described without giving him away puts him in close contact with primary education. At some point, while describing his present occupation, Noor said: "Much value is placed on education in Mauritian society, success at examination becomes a very, very important criteria in the Mauritian mentality". This is what Noor said when I invited him to explain these statements further.

In Mauritius, we had the British with a system of education where the aim was eventually to produce people with academic qualifications, who could go to the clerical and administrative services. Not of the highest order, but up to the middle order. So it was mostly an academic education which was there. These types of jobs were regarded as jobs to be aimed at as career prospects. You had this and outside this you had agriculture. Being labourer was a tough job you know! If you had academic education, outside this public sector, there was very little else, some shopkeepers and a few industries and nothing else. And then of course, you had a group of people who had come as immigrants, who did not want their children to suffer the same lot of an immigrant. Especially people from India, these people

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<sup>93</sup> Like other cases in this report, the names used in the following section are fictional. However, in contrast with previous cases, in order to protect the anonymity of more recognisable participants, the fictitious names utilised in the following section are not necessarily a true reflection of the gender and ethnic group of the people they depict.



had come to Mauritius to work out for themselves a better destiny. Working out for themselves a better destiny meant that they had had to change their conditions of life, which to them were not acceptable. They were not rich enough to start their own business. So their only hope was education. If you look at the Indian community, in their culture education has always played an important role. You can see in India the number of unemployed graduates! It is part of their culture to go for education and therefore, in a way, there was a desire on the part of these people to go for education, to get a certificate to get a better job, and every parent wanted this to happen, to have something better for their children, get a white collar job and avoid the sweat, the perspiration of the sugar-cane fields. And coupled with this [pause] sort of attraction of administration career, academic education, the desire for people to [pause], the lack of employment prospects which were lucrative, coupled with this, around the 40s, after World War, the price of sugar went up. There were many people, Indians, who had small plots of land and overnight their standard of living went up. They could afford education for their children. So, they were not satisfied with just primary education which government was providing free at the time. Even at that time the 1950s there were over 85% of children of primary school going age who were going to school. Back in the 1960s and now, you have around 96%, may be even more who go to school. And with people becoming richer, with prices of sugar going on, you are able to buy more, the whole standard of living goes up. People are not satisfied only with primary education. They looked for secondary education and in a period of five to seven years, you had the number of secondary schools increasing for seven to 285. You had a number of private enterprises who came in, trying to give secondary education in buildings that were not meant for secondary education. Now I tell you what happened. There is one thing called the  $n+1$  factor. If my child is having primary, his child is having primary and so on one of us will want a bit more than primary. That is the  $n+1$ ... You have created this desire to study, which gathers its own momentum. You have the number of jobs, which were restricted, the number of schools which people came to perceive as "good school" which was restricted. So at the end of primary, you have this bottleneck, a rush for people to go to the good schools, a rush to get to the good schools. And you have the CPE exam becoming highly selective, and straight away then you had the phenomenon of private tuition culture. I give private tuition to my daughter, then you'll give tuition to your daughter, and if you start to give tuition in STD VI, I'll do it in STD V, then STD IV and so on. We have pupils taking private tuition which is a system parallel so this all leads to a, the, the, the [pause] the importance that we place on the CPE, the importance we place on getting a certificate which will give us access to good school at secondary level. And then once we go through the secondary stream, we go for a good certificate at the HSC level so that we can get a good university to study. You know, in the University of Mauritius, because of the demand, for every six persons who applied only one is selected. This means that in certain disciplines, even with two A's and one B, you are not able to get admission whereas with many external Universities you'd get admission. This in a way explains to us this [pause] rush, rush for education. The gold rush! Now [pause], in this process you have what we call an elitist system because we are prizing success for the examination which grows *farouchement* (fiercely) selective, elitist. So what happens? You have teachers who work with those they know will pass. From the very first day that children get to school, all teachers know rightly or wrongly that children coming from a particular socio-

economic background, their performance is going to be low. And therefore, you attempt to help them once, twice, three times, and then no more, within a term of the first year at school, you are making the destiny of the child and he stays a backward child! ... I read somewhere, somebody said, the best advice one can give a child whom you want to perform educationally well, the best advice to him, would be to select the parents where he will be born. Anyway, this motive for people to go for education, at one time you know, we had severe unemployment problems, that was in the 1970s and this meant that people again, sort of rushed on education to get out of this problem (P4).

On several occasions in the course of our communication, Noor implied criticism of what was happening at the school level saying "with our methods of teaching here in Mauritius you know!". This is what Noor said when I asked him to tell me about the teaching methods in Mauritian primary schools:

... Unfortunately, most of the teaching methods in our schools 95% of the teaching uses direct methods, lectures, telling, very little involvement of children. You see, because of time pressure, because the syllabus which is too heavy for the time available, because of the need to make children pass, the need to produce results and unfortunately because the performance of teachers is still implicitly judged by the amount of children who pass the exam, therefore what happen, you are not creating educated children what you are doing is giving them a mass of information three quarters of which they will forget within six months and one quarter is obsolete by the time they finish school....Now in our exam papers, we try to have questions which will attempt at higher order thinking, because what eventually we would have wished to happen is to help children to develop their cognitive ability. Make them [pause] make them think scientifically, rationally, solve problems, creative thinking, scientific mind. Eventually I think this ought to have been the essence of education, knowledge, a certain amount of knowledge is essential, fundamental. Certain knowledge never changes ... You see EVS was like that, the aim behind EVS was to, for EVS, teaching strategies were spelled out for teachers to help children develop their instinct for exploring, their instinct for a wider sense of wonder to see what was happening around them. All these experiments were in teachers' books, but teachers are so pressed, they show a few things to the children and they are asked to learn it by heart. No one realised, took into account the amount of time, the other methods of teaching [different from those described in the previous chapter] would require. I can go for activity-based, child-centred but this would mean that I'll have to change the system of examining. Even there we have some problems, in our examination papers, we test essential learning abilities and desired ones. But what teachers do, they take a series of past exam papers [ask the pupils to] try to guess the answers to these questions, make them learn them by heart. It's not testing. It's still memory testing. We realise this but there is the exam. So here we are, a [pause] in a vicious circle! (P 4).

Like Noor, most educationists expressed opinions in agreement with those expressed by teachers and parents described earlier. They also voiced opinions that can be categorised as criticism of other people and of what they perceive as the shortcomings of the system. The following outlines what educationists construe as the dominant aspects and issues of Mauritian primary education and the why and how this is so in their view.

Most outside school participants acknowledged and substantiated the belief held by other participants that education is desirable and important. They, as Anisha in the following, assigned this belief to everyone in Mauritian society:

Everybody in Mauritius is interested in education, whether in villages or whether in towns. This is the only thing that makes people go mad. This is the only thing that will make people go on strike. They will put up with other things, water not running properly, etc.. They will not do anything about that. But for education they will! (P2).

Educationists described primary education as the means to facilitate professional and social climbing and, as exemplified by Noor's comments, they provided historical and cultural explanations for the desirability of education in Mauritian society. Most made mention of the Mauritian migrant past and of the desire of people, because of that migrant past, to work themselves a better destiny. They also mentioned the prospects of working in administration as almost the only alternative to working in the sugar cane fields and the fact that education over time became perceived as 'the passport' to do so. Most remarked that free education improved economic means and that aspirations for white collar jobs strengthened a certain "hunger for education" and like Noor, noted the competitive mentality that followed increased educational participation in their country.

In addition, most educationists, as exemplified by Noor's comments, agreed with teachers who view Mauritian primary education as a system that "favors an intellectual elite". Like teachers, they associated pupils' performances with their families' socio-economic background and more particularly the educational environment a "good background" provides. Similarly, most associated pupils' achievements and potential achievements with their socio-economic background. However, as the following illustrates, they ascribed some responsibility to teachers for contributing/perpetuating the "favoring of an intellectual elite". Robert<sup>94</sup> for example noted that some teachers:

*... créent une ségrégation intellectuelle. Ils mettent les enfants en petits groupes et se disent: 'Bon, les très bons, je m'occupe d'eux, ceux -là ils sont moins bons, je vais faire ce que je peux avec eux, et ceux-ci ils ne sont pas bons du tout, je ne peux rien faire pour eux!' (P 3).*

... create an intellectual segregation. They split children in small groups thinking: 'Ok the good ones, I look after them, these are less good, I'll do what I can for them and these, they are no good at all, I can't do anything for them!' (Robert).

Ratna explained that:

Teachers with a class of 40, of which 10 bright ones, he will concentrate on the bright one because his reputation is going to be built on that, how many will pass in his class, how many will be classés (ranked) among the 2500 or whatever. Upper grade teachers are very interested in developing a good reputation. They know it will bring them plenty of private tuition! (P13).

Like Robert and Ratna, most educationists said that teachers gave their full attention to best able pupils 'only' and like Ratna, explained that "turning out ranked pupils" was in teachers' best interest. One participant said: "Bright pupils are seen as an investment for

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<sup>94</sup> Robert has been a primary school "general purpose" teacher in the past before as he says: "going up in the education hierarchy".

teachers". Many mentioned that teachers are said to reach the apex of their reputation when they get their photo in the newspapers, alongside that of one of their school or private pupil who ranked first, second or third at the CPE examination. This, educationists thought, would bring them "a lot" of private tuition. Several reminded that in the past teachers were paid according to results said: "*les mauvaises habitudes sont difficiles à changer!* (bad habits die hard!)".

Educationists, like other participants, construed the ambition to secure a place in a 'good college' and the requirements for achieving this ambition as the central issue of Mauritian primary education. In his communication, Noor used the expression "gold rush" and other participants the word "race" in order to qualify this ambition. Although most sympathised with teachers' complaints in regard to the volume of what they have to teach and with the fact that as one says: "their [teachers'] hands are tied because they have to teach everything for the exam". Most, however, like the following, put certain limits to their commiseration:

*Le même enseignant qui se plaint des programmes, il fera beaucoup plus avec le même programme lorsqu'il sera payé pour le faire! [leçons particulières] (P 14).*

That same teacher who complains about the programme, he is going to do much more when he is paid to do so! [private tuition].

All educationists, like teachers and parents earlier, said that they deplored the volume of work that the achievement of this ambition requires, as well as the pressure in terms of time this puts on children. In addition however, like Mannick and Anisha in the following excerpt, most blame parents and teachers for their lack of compassion as well as for enforcing this pressure and are especially vocal about additional tuition:

Parents and teachers don't realise that if a child has been studying from 8 until 4 in the afternoon that's enough! How much more can he take? (P 6).

You know kids are taking private tuition as from STD III! They are seven years old! The parents are mad! They should not agree to that! This is really something you know and if the teachers don't give private tuition the parents complain against them. It has become a complete mess! And the child? He just goes on doing his exercises! (P 2).

Three educationists said that they chose not to expose their children to the Mauritian primary education system. Veena gave several reasons for sending her children to the primary section of one of the few elitist (in the North American, European or Australian sense) Mauritian private primary schools. She said that she does not want to impose "the CPE madness" on her children and remarked that in sending them to that college, her children have a better chance to finish their primary and secondary schooling uninterrupted. In addition, Veena said that she chose a French college due to the fact that she and her husband being "rather anglophones" can provide their children an exposure to the English language themselves.

In addition to not wanting to expose her children and herself to the pressures described earlier, Veena and the two other educationists who chose to pay for their children's education, chose to do so because they questioned the merits of the education provided in Mauritian government and aided primary schools. Kailash for example said:

*Quels sont les acquis pour ces enfants [ceux préparant le CPE] à part la volonté de travail? (P 8).*

What knowledge, apart this will for work, do these children [those preparing for CPE] acquire?

Veena, Kailash and Anouksha, who all chose to educate their children outside the main-stream, were critical of the teaching methods used in main stream schools. Anouksha, who herself attended a government school, recalled that despite having been a very good pupil she carried with her a "paralysing shyness" throughout her entire primary schooling. She did not volunteer answers even when she was certain that she had the right answer. She also said that teachers never tried to help her to shake this shyness. She noted that, in contrast, her children's participation is solicited by their teachers for "all sorts of activities" in their respective classes. She described her children as "articulate and assertive in comparison" to herself at their age. She, Kailash and Veena noted that, by schooling in these private schools, their children learn to contribute to classroom activities while children in main-stream schools are not taught this. They were not as Kailash put it: "*enfermés dans leur petit monde ou rien ne compte mais eux-mêmes* (locked in their little world where no one counts but themselves)".

Anouksha, Kailash and Veena all mentioned that they do not want their children to have their future determined at 11 years of age. In the following statement, Veena voices their concerns about the fact that far away stakes, not necessarily theirs at this point in time, are imposed on children.

In Mauritius, if you don't get a good college you don't go far. The stakes you put on children are stakes that have to do with something that will happen in 10 years time. These are parents' stakes and it's not fair for the child! (P 11).

In addition, as illustrated by Kailash's and Veena's words, they worry about the moral impact schooling, and more specifically the "race for good colleges", may have on children in the future.

*Nous ne donnons pas à nos enfants des modèles à part cette espèce de cause pour le succès! (P 8).*

Apart from this cause for success we do not provide models for our children!

What is going to happen to this great majority of tomorrow's citizens whose memory of schooling is based on failure on being told continually that they are failures since they have not achieved *à être classés!* (ranking!) (P 11).

Other educationists, like Veena, Kailash and Anouksha, are generally critical of the teaching methods practised in Mauritian primary schools. Like Noor, who said that one needs to change "the system of examining" in order to be able to use "activity based" and "child centred" methods<sup>95</sup>, most blamed the restraint the Mauritian examination system puts on teaching. Silamba said: "In Mauritian schools really, testing replaces teaching" (P 14).

Educationists gave other reasons for their criticism of the teaching methods in Mauritian primary schools. They have, as the following statements show, played the game of 'throwing the ball in the other camp'. The words of an educationist, not engaged in teacher training, illustrated the polite criticism voiced by some about teacher training:

*Il ne faudrait pas qu'on leur enseigne à l'institut pédagogique des recettes toutes faites qu'ils vont appliquer comme si c'était la bible et les dix commandements de Moïse! Il faut qu'on développe chez eux un esprit critique vis à vis des méthodes d'enseignement pour qu'ils deviennent eux mêmes très eclectiques au niveau de l'approche des méthodes. Qu'ils puissent apprendre à penser sur le bien fondé de toutes les méthodes qui leur sont proposées. Ce n'est pas parce qu'un chargé de cours a dit qu'il faut enseigner la lecture comme ça que je l'accepte, je dis oui, c'est la parole d'évangile et je mets en pratique dans toutes les écoles avec tous les enfants qui seront à ma charge, non! (P 3).*

It should not be that they get taught recipes at the teachers training college, recipes that they are

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<sup>95</sup> Methods believed by most as desirable, in contrast with "frontal teaching" "chalk and talk teaching" and "rote learning" methods believed by most as undesirable.



going to follow as if they were words from the bible and Moses ten commandments! They should develop in them [teacher trainees] a critical mind with regard to their teaching methods so that they themselves become eclectic vis a vis their teaching approach. That they learn to analyse the methods put to them. It is not because, lecturers say to teach reading like that I have to accept it, to say yes, that it is bible words that I can apply to in all schools and with all children in my charge, no !

Other educationists, like Anisha, said that inspectors and teachers set in their old ways were the ones to blame for the perpetuation of talk and chalk teaching to the whole class methods used in primary schools:

Group work is not used in schools but it should be. Student teachers when they go to schools, they start with it and then I am afraid they get into bad habits and at the end of their year [practicum] they don't do it anymore. Sometimes I must say they have problems, too many kids in the classroom, and they can't manage, so they tend to go back to chalk and talk....It [group work] is also not widely used because of CPE exam, teachers have to cover the syllabus and carry on doing exercises. Another reason is because the Inspectorate of the Ministry of education. They have got used to their own ways doing things. When they go to school and see the teacher doing what they have been taught as the good way of doing it he gets a conflict because the inspector says he should do it in a different way. One thing students have been taught is not to get the whole class to answer a question. That's one example. Because they were taught that way [themselves as pupils], they tend to ask a question and then everybody shouts the answer as a group....The head teachers in the school do that. Student teachers say the head teacher came and helped, he began to ask questions to the whole class. It's very difficult you can't tell the head teacher that he shouldn't do that because at the MIE we were told that we are not supposed to do that! (P 2).

Others, like Robert and Anisha in the following, said that both the quantity and level of education at which teacher trainees are recruited had some bearing on the relevancy of teaching for "modern times".

At the moment for example, aspirant teachers only need seven credits at school Certificate in order to become trainees. "*C'est dérisoire!* (It's derisory!)". Then they give them a two years formation and they think it's sufficient to respond to the demands of modern times! This is completely "*démodé!* (old fashioned!) (P 3).

One year at the MIE and one year school -based its not enough for what they are supposed to do in schools. O level students do not have any background in sciences. I take sciences because it is most important for the country now that we are industrialising. Our workforce at whatever level, they must have a good background of scientific and technical things ! (P 2).

Most educationists, as Anisha, also expressed concerns about the relevancy and usefulness of primary education in preparing people for a fast changing and developing Mauritius.

I think in a country like Mauritius, really developing, I think it is through education that we are going to sustain this development. Now, an education system in line with the needs of Mauritius in the year 2000, it's not a primary education where the child learns everything by heart to pass the exam. It's a primary education that must teach the child to understand what he does. The era of the yes man this finished. Our industries which will be computerised soon they won't need arms and hands only to make the machines function, they will need thinking heads (P 2).

Most educationists said that, in the Mauritian primary education system, children were asked to "concentrate on academic only" and for this reason were not given "an all-round development". Mannick called this the "narrowness of exposure in the Mauritian primary education system" and said:

Pupils get taught academic things only, book studies, to the detriment of other aspects of education like physical education, aesthetic appreciation, you know all these things sport and so on (P 6).

Mira on her part said:

You see the child is not getting an all round development. Children from an early age are shaped in such a way as to believe that education is simply writing skills, reading skills, mathematical skills everything academics. But these children when

they become adults, they won't be practical, they won't be pragmatic. You see them here in Mauritius these highly educated people, they have a breakdown on the highway, they put their hands on their waist, they perspire and they don't know what to do. They are not pragmatic. Now in our schools, we are not preparing our children to face life, we are not creating adaptable people. You see because parents are so ambitious they are killing everything in their children (P 5).

Sonia's last statement conveys the sense of gloominess most educationists said they felt about Mauritian primary education. Mannick, with the following words summed the gloominess voiced by many educationists.

There is one thing that children are missing out nowadays you know and won't get back you know! It's their childhood! They won't be able to get that childhood that they are not having right now! They miss out on things you know! (P 6).

Like teachers and parents, all educationists blamed what one person called "*Cette horreur de CPE!* (this dreadful CPE!)" for the problems of Mauritian primary education. Most as the following statement illustrates, found it inevitable, saying: "What else can you expect when there are only some 4000 places in good colleges for some 30.000 pupils taking the exam!".

Some educationists, like Manick said that they saw an examination at the end of primary as well as some form of competition as necessary:

I am not against an exam at the end of primary, as an assessment exercise but not for ranking purpose! It's good to know how the children are progressing. to assess. And also you know, countries which have abolished this sort of competition, I know that there are no incentive on the part of many children to do well. There must be some degree of competition. You know it's something that exists in a modern world at all levels in all spheres, but of course it must be healthy competition, not ranking like we do which is very unhealthy! (P 6).

Like Silamba, some asked:

*Si y'a pas un examen comment on va calculer les capacites d'un enfant pour le diriger vers ce qu'il peut faire? (P 14B).*

Without an examination how are you going to calculate children's abilities in order to determine what they can do?

Some educationists, like Anisha saw the introduction of continuous assessment in partial or complete replacement of the CPE as providing an answer to this question.

Others however say that this may work in other countries but would not really work in Mauritius because parents would be against it.

Noor's statement at the end of his account, "We are in a vicious circle!" depicts a reaction expressed by all educationists. They, as Anisha in the following and despite their differences in opinion said, shrugging their shoulders, something like:

*Tant qui y'aura pas assez de bons colleges !*

As long as we don't have enough good colleges!

## **Summary**

This section has outlined what some Mauritian educationists construed as the dominant issues in Mauritian primary education. The comments made by educationists supported and expanded on comments made by people previously and introduced new issues.

Their opinions can be categorised as criticisms of other people and as criticisms of other peoples' efforts to teach and of what they perceived as the shortcomings of the system.

Like teachers and parents they described primary education as a step facilitating professional and social climbing. They shared teachers opinion in the belief that the system favored an intellectual elite and linked pupils' achievements and prospects with the supportive conditions provided by their parents. Like teachers they associated supportive and non- supportive conditions with the socio- economic position of pupils' parents.

Like teachers and most other participants, educationists saw the ambition/necessity to secure a place in a good college as a central issue in Mauritian primary education and similarly saw the volume and pressure of work especially in terms of time, as major concerns. All expressed criticism about teaching methods used in Mauritian primary schools which all blamed on the constraints brought about by examinations, some on the kind and length of training teachers received, others on the influence of teachers and inspectors who they said were set in their old ways and other still on the poor educational attainments of teachers.

Most educationists expressed concerns about the relevance and usefulness of education provided in schools, deploring the fact that it does not provide an all round development of children, also generally questioning its relevance to the demands of a modern Mauritius.

Three educationists who chose not to expose their children to main-stream education said that they were concerned about the fact that main-stream education cultivated individualism in children and deplored the fact that it did not encourage participative teaching and learning strategies. These three educationists said that they saw wanting to

secure a good college as a stake in the future imposed by parents and thus not fair to children. They also expressed concern about the moral impact such competitive search for success would have on children in the future and expressed their concerns for those whose growing up was rooted in a feeling of failure.

Some educationists said that examinations were necessary in order to assess children while others said that examinations were necessary to rank children. Some said that continuous assessment whether partial or alongside the examination could replace the CPE others said that this would not work in Mauritius.

All educationists likened the issues related to Mauritian primary education to a vicious circle. All deplored the fact that in the process of schooling and because of the demands of schooling, Mauritian children lost their childhood and all said they thought nothing would change as long as there were not enough good colleges.

Having created an account of school contexts, processes experiences and revealed what parents, teachers, pupils and educationists construed as the dominant issues of Mauritian primary education, in the next chapter, I now bring these findings together and discuss them in light of the research questions. It is also in this next chapter that I discuss the contrast between the 'official' and participant stakeholders' understandings of Mauritian primary education.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **A SOCIO-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MAURITIUS**

This chapter is a discussion of the research findings organised around several themes as determined by the research questions. First, I discuss what characterised pupils, teachers, parents and educationists as stakeholders and made them able to contribute their actions and view-points to formulate an understanding of Mauritian primary education. Second, I discuss the processes, which framed and regulated pupils' experiences of primary education in Four Hills and Terre Bleue. Third, I discuss what was construed by stakeholders as the dominant issues of Mauritian primary education. Fourth, I discuss and compare the reasons which underlie the different Mauritian perceptions and views of Mauritian primary education. Lastly, I bring all findings together to provide a summary answer to the main research question.

#### **Teachers, pupils, parents and educationists as stakeholders**

##### **(Research Question One)**

All participants selected had direct personal and/or professional involvement and interest in Mauritian primary education. All attended or had attended school in Mauritius and all, as Mauritians, experienced primary education as an aspect of their culture, a dimension of the society which, as individuals, they made up. To varying degrees, but for most, primary education was a significant aspect of their daily routines and concerns. Teachers and pupils for example spent substantial parts of their days

engaged in activities related to primary education. Many adult participants (including teachers and educationists) were closely related to primary education as parents, while all adult participants (except those categorised exclusively as parents) earned their living and place in society through primary education related activities. First-hand experience fastened to the realities and actuality of personal and/or professional experience of Mauritian primary education is an important as well as the basic characteristic that defined stakeholders. Beyond this characteristic shared by teachers, pupils, parents and educationists who were grouped together for methodological purpose, there were differences. Actions and more significantly, polarised interests within and across these groups differentiated teachers, pupils, parents and educationists as stakeholders.

Teachers were classified into several groups according to the specificity of their tasks. Most head teachers and deputy head teachers did not teach. Acting as a link between the school and the Ministry, their tasks were administrative and supervisory in a disciplinarian rather than pedagogical fashion. Classroom teachers were classified according to their teaching specialities as general purpose teachers, oriental language teachers and specialist teachers and according to the grade level they taught either upper grade or lower grade.

In whatever role teachers were engaged, gender influenced allocation of duty. In both schools, general purpose teachers appointed to teach in upper-grades were male. The exceptions were two female teachers who taught in 'repeater' classes. All general purpose teachers appointed to teach in lower grades were female. Both head teachers and most deputy head teachers were male. Male deputy head teachers did not teach



while female deputy head teachers taught. Gender also determined the work load ascribed to individuals within these two groups. Male teachers, because of the extra tuition had heavier workloads and earned more money than female teachers. Daily teaching time ranged from four and a half hours for lower-grade teachers up to seven hours for upper grade teachers. For head teachers and deputy head teachers, seniority was added to gender in influencing who did what and how much of it.

Teachers could be further differentiated according to the privileges and disadvantages they derived from their position in the school order and from their gender. Head teachers and deputy head teachers, for example, commanded high standing as they had the power to grant and withdraw permission for a variety of reasons to all members of staff. In the case of head teachers power stemmed from the fact that they were instrumental in the ways teachers' careers proceeded or stalled (yearly reports, allocating teachers to different class levels). Data shows that delegating work to junior members (or the secretary) in order to lighten their workload was one privilege head teachers and deputy head teachers derived from their positions of power. This advantage did not apply to female deputy head teachers.

Data indicated that the preferential appointment afforded male general purpose teachers, that of teaching in upper grades, where private tuition could be given and especially in A streams, where it was in high demand, translated into sizeable financial gains. Because teaching in upper grades, and more specifically in A streams, was allocated according to gender, male teachers were not only able to derive financial gains, they were also able to perpetuate their position of advantage in the school order. These advantages and positions of privilege did not apply to female general purpose teachers.

Data does not show 'gender privileging' and 'position privileging' as applying to oriental language and specialist teachers. These teachers, in contrast with general purpose teachers, could derive no economic gain through 'gender privileging' in the school setting, so this may perhaps serve to explain this discrepancy. It could also be argued that as a group, oriental languages' teachers were privileged due to the fact that they taught (direct teaching) for only two and a half-hours per day.

Pupils were not a homogenous group. Like teachers they could be differentiated according to their grade levels which entailed differences in terms of time spent working in school, which ranged from four and a half-hours in lower grades up to seven hours in upper grades. While teachers 'working more' brought them financial advantages, when pupils 'worked more' (extra tuition) this increased their chances of success at examination. Like teachers, some pupils enjoyed privileges that others did not. For pupils, this translated into a strong polarisation in terms of their position and treatment in school and in terms of the goals and priorities they set for themselves. Two interrelated areas differentiated pupils as stakeholders. They were 'social privilege' and 'ability privileging'.

The "teachability" factors, such as stimulating home environment, higher social class and parents' education, noted by Lockheed and Verspoor (1991), were considerations which, in both schools, had an effect, or were construed as having potential effects on pupils' success or chances of success (high marks at examinations). Although being bright and meritorious (that is working very hard) could, at least for some individuals, compensate for low "teachability" factors, pupils were polarised according to social privileges. One group comprising pupils from higher socio-economic strata had

advantageous home environments and another group comprising pupils from lower socio-economic strata had less advantageous home environments.

Pupils were labelled "low" and "good" according to processes of categorisation in place within the Mauritian education system, and in place within the school settings. Pupils were streamed accordingly. The most able pupils, the 'elite' group were more likely to have favourable home environments and were found in A streams. Less able pupils, 'non-elite' group and 'repeater' groups were found in other streams. The least able pupils among the 'non- elite' and 'repeater' groups, were more likely to have disadvantageous home environments. Pupils were given differential treatment depending on real and ascribed ability. Ability privileging, discussed in detail later in this chapter, consisted of giving more attention and showing greater interest to 'elite/able' pupils and resulted in differentiating pupils as deserving and non-deserving or as included and excluded.

All parents were unanimous in wanting the best for their children (a good job, success at exams, social mobility). Parents from higher socio-economic strata were generally more able to be supportive in their actions and resolute in their valuing of education than parents from lower strata who had less time, money and education for doing so. Parents from higher socio-economic strata together with 'elite' pupils were more precise in stating their goals and priorities (educational and professional) and also more engaged and involved in their actions facilitating the achievement of these goals than were parents from lower socio-economic strata and less able pupils. These considerations polarised parents and pupils into two groups: an involved/ engaged group comprising

parents and elite pupils from higher socio economic strata and a less engaged, more submissive group comprising other parents and pupils.

Like other participants, educationists had first hand experience of primary education. They, however, stood-out from all other groups because for most of them their experience of primary education was (at the time of study) somewhat removed from the reality of the 'chalk face' and revolved around less personal issues. The most obvious exceptions were those educationists who had children in Mauritian government primary schools. All of the educationist group shared in their criticism of the Mauritian primary education system and in their interest in pedagogical and developmental issues which, as will be discussed later in this chapter, were rarely construed as issues by individuals in other stakeholders groups. To a certain extent, because of their awareness of and interest in 'quality issues' of primary education, educationists could be described as bridging a gap between the view-points of international and local/school level groups. Having the means and privilege to exercise choice, some individuals within the educationist group elected not to expose their children to main stream primary education. These individuals rejoined many parents in doing what they thought was best, even if so differently, for the future of their children.

### **Summary**

First-hand experience, fastened to the reality and actuality of personal, professional experience and involvement in Mauritian primary education were the primary factors that characterised teachers, pupils, parents and educationists as stakeholders. First hand experience made individuals, within these broad groups, able and entitled to contribute naturalistic actions and view-points in order to understand Mauritian primary education

more comprehensively.

Beyond this shared characteristic, stakeholders' actions but more significantly the nature and scope of their interests inside and across broad groups characterised teachers, pupils, parents and educationists as stakeholders in Mauritian primary education.

Teachers and pupils were assigned to and engaged in distinct tasks and shouldered distinct workloads. They derived and/or were ascribed distinct standing/status within the school, advantages, handicaps and privileges from their position in the school order and /or from their gender. I call these 'gender privileging' and 'position privileging'. Pupils derived distinct advantages or experienced handicaps from advantageous and less advantageous home environments, usually linked to the socio-economic position of their parents. They were given differential treatment depending on their real and ascribed educational ability. These factors I call social privileges and ability privileging.

Parents wanted the best for their children. Together with pupils, they were polarised into two groups: an involved/engaged group able, mostly because of their social privileges, to articulate and support specific goals and priorities and a less engaged group which, because of less advantageous circumstances was not able to be as supportive in trying to achieve goals and priorities. In contrast with other participant stakeholders, educationists shared an awareness of and interest in 'quality issues' of primary education.

Mauritian teachers, pupils, parents and educationists all participated in the enterprise of Mauritian primary education through their individual and group actions. It is however

their interests (financial, success, status and pedagogical), together with their position in society and the school order which defined them as stakeholders. The defining of stakeholders involved differentiating processes, some of which may be construed as circumstantial and others as intentional. All entail polarities in terms of privileges.

Differentiating processes may be viewed as circumstantial when, for example, teachers were categorised according to their teaching specialty, pupils according to their grade levels and parents according to their levels of support. On the other hand, differentiating processes may be viewed as intentional when, as was the case of ability and gender privileging, they were ascribed by individuals or groups to other individuals or groups.

### **Research Question One**

*What characterises teachers, parents, pupils and educationists as stakeholders able to contribute to an understanding of Mauritian primary education?*

#### **Summary answer**

*Past or present, personal and/or professional experience and involvement in Mauritian primary education defined teachers, parents, and pupils as stakeholders able to contribute to an understanding of Mauritian primary education.*

*Teachers were differentiated according to:*

- *Specificity of task (administrative, teaching specialty and grade level)*
- *Standing/advantages/handicaps/privileges which were derived from: position in*

- *the school order and gender.*

*Pupils were differentiated according to:*

- *Grade level*
- *Real and ascribed ability levels*
- *Advantages /handicaps they derived from home environment and socio-economic strata*
- *Degree of their involvement in educational activities*
- *Precision in their statement of goals*

*Parents were differentiated according to:*

- *Degree of involvement and support*
- *Precision in their statement of goals*

*Educationists were differentiated from 1, 2 and 3 according to:*

- *Degree of personal involvement in primary education*
- *Scope of their pedagogical knowledge*

The defining of stakeholders, as it has been presented and discussed, may serve as a broad starting point in the delineation of stakeholders in the social construction of primary education in Mauritius. Further research would indeed disclaim, confirm and/

or refine this suggested defining and differentiating of individuals as stakeholders in the enterprise of primary education in Mauritius. In the next sections I discuss stakeholders' actions and view-points and the ways in which these contributed to the understanding of Mauritian primary education.

### **School level actions, interactions and experiences (Research Question Two)**

In the previous section I discussed what defined and characterised teachers, pupils, parents and educationists as participant stakeholders in the social construction of Mauritian primary education. I now discuss pupils' and teachers' actions and interactions in the class settings. More specifically I propose an answer to research question two in which I asked what dominant features and practices framed and regulated pupils' experiences of primary education in class settings. In order to answer this question, I summarise related findings presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight and discuss them in relation to analyses of conditions, practices, recommendations and ideals about primary education in developing nations which have been presented in Chapter Two.

In both schools, starts and ends of lessons, of breaks, of teaching of Oriental languages, physical education and catechism, as well as of extra tuition, were systematically organised and timed. Pupils and teachers followed set and specific routines including regular morning assembly during which time they were notified of any special happenings. Terre Bleue and Four Hills comprised orderly and clean environments in which teachers maintained discipline, began lessons on time and let students know what was expected of them. This is in sharp contrast to the prevailing conditions in other



developing nations as suggested by Marlaine Lockheed and Adriaan Verspoor in their (1991) study.

In both schools, classrooms lacked space and were austere. Furnishing was basic, sometimes inadequate but at the same time, all pupils had a place to sit and work and all were provided with textbooks free of charge. Teachers sat or stood in front of the class, while pupils sat at their desks facing them and the blackboard. Teachers gave their directives to the whole class in order to structure classroom activities. They kept control of what pupils did, how they did it and for how long. Teaching consisted of passing information which was read by teachers from textbooks or copied on the blackboard and of occasional teacher's demonstration on the blackboard. Pupils sat at their desks listening to teachers' explanations. Bright pupils were occasionally sent to the blackboard to work out or correct an exercise in front of the class. During lessons, in order to check on comprehension, pupils were engaged in chorus repeating of right answers directly from textbooks and were prompted into finishing the teachers' sentences. This activity appeared to satisfy teachers that pupils had understood what had been taught. Lessons were followed by written desk-work, which was systematically, but also mechanically marked by teachers during class towards the end of the lesson. This work was ticked if it contained the right answer.

The instructional practices observed in the classrooms of Terre Bleue and Four Hills had much in common with the instructional practices of classrooms in developing nations described by Avalos (1996a & 1996b), Wolf, Chiefelbein and Valenzuela (1993), Jennis-Wray (1984), Fuller (1991), Fuller and Snyder (1991), Nitsaisook (1985) and Carron and Ta Ngoc Châu (1996) outlined in Chapter Two. In the two schools,

teaching practices were 'teacher-centered', 'frontal' and 'authoritarian'. Teachers were the dominant providers of information. They instigated all activities and taught the class not the pupils. They engaged all children in common activities and used the same strategies in all situations and for all children despite their varying abilities.

Pupils rarely engaged in solitary learning, such as silent reading whilst in class. Their individual work was not displayed for all to see and share. Pupils were put in situation where material was handed down to them by teachers and they were never engaged in situations or activities where learning from other pupils was encouraged, promoted and facilitated. Individual inputs were not encouraged and solicited only from pupils likely to provide the 'right answers'. Pupils were presented with the knowledge 'worth-knowing', that is the knowledge which would enable them to get good marks and succeed in examinations. They were taught in a way that showed them that knowledge is either right or wrong, a static entity to be caught and memorised and they were expected to conform their answers to that knowledge.

In the two schools, as in many schools of developing nations, rote learning and reading aloud were extensively used. Teachers did not ask open-ended questions. Most of their questions were asked with the aim of promoting and checking the memorising of encyclopedic knowledge, which would be recalled during examinations. Memorising was the main challenge pupils in Terre Bleue and Four Hills faced. Data relating to instructional practices corresponds with comments made by Kellaghan and Greaney (1992) about the compelling pressure public examinations exerted on activities in schools. In both schools for example, subjects mandated in the official curriculum such

as art and physical education, but not featured in examinations, were ignored by general purpose teachers.

When examined against the recommendations for effective teaching in schools of developing nations proposed in the research conducted by Lockheed and Verspoor (1991), the teaching methods in place in Four Hills and Terre Bleue included some of the basic 'positive practices' and a significant proportion of what was presented as 'negative practices' in that study. Basic 'positive practices' included the fact that in both schools and during lessons, material was presented in an orderly and systematic fashion, that pupils were given desk written work to do in order to consolidate what had been taught and that their work was systematically monitored and evaluated.

In the light of the findings of Lockheed and Verspoor (1991), data revealed that 'negative practices' could be found in the areas of teaching delivery style and the areas of teachers' expectations, monitoring and evaluating of pupils. For example, teachers did not take pupils' individual differences into account when they taught. They tuned their teaching to the best able pupils, paced teaching delivery in accordance with the amount of what they had to teach, acting as if all pupils were of similar abilities. The teaching practices in both schools made pupils recipients rather than active learners.

Data indicated that pupils were not able to practise what they were taught and apply it to their own experience. Most of the written work they did following teachers' explanations consisted of repeating rather than in creative application and adaptation of what was taught. Lessons such as in mathematics for example, which could have

involved manipulation and experimentation did not. The overlooking of what children had seen and heard during the visit made by South African visitors was a vivid example of the fact that no link was made in school between children's personal experiences and their learning activities.

In both schools and from early grades, pupils knew what was expected of them and also knew what was not expected of them. Pupils knew the appropriate behaviour in class, the work and homework they had to do. They also knew that they were expected to succeed at exams. The ways in which pupils learnt this information came through slow processes of conditioning rather than through clear open directives.

In both schools and at all levels, monitoring and evaluating processes served purposes other than monitoring and evaluating pupils' learning and progress. Through monitoring techniques, which I called 'prompting for the right answer' technique, teachers gave themselves permission to move along in their teaching. The fact that one pupil gave the right answer reassured or convinced them that they were teaching as they should since they got a correct answer. This gave teachers the green light to get on with their presentation of the curriculum. Teachers were, in that sense, not monitoring pupils' learning, rather, they used the fact that able pupils were giving correct answers to punctuate/give rhythm to their teaching. The evaluation of pupils' performance was for the most part done in order to categorise them.

The categorisation was made according to the pupils' capability to follow the teachers' directives and explanations, to their ability to provide appropriate answers in their written work and in relation to their scores at end of term examinations. Accordingly

they were labelled 'excellent', 'good' or 'low elements' while those repeating Standard VI were labelled 'repeaters'. In upper grades pupils were streamed accordingly. Teachers' expectations of pupils were adjusted to their ability position in the school order. For example, teachers expected less from less able pupils and more from able pupils, thus sanctioning the 'ability privileging' principle described in the first part of this discussion.

'Ability privileging' condemned by one participant educationist (Robert) as "*ségrégation intellectuelle* (intellectual segregation)" resulted in and encouraged differential treatment of pupils. For example, best able pupils, because they had more chances of ranking at CPE, were given private tuition while less able pupils, with no chance for doing so, were not. Similarly, best able pupils were engaged in classroom activities while less able pupils were disregarded. Less or no work was expected of them and in some cases they were not disciplined as others. The examples of 'ability privileging' in the classrooms of Four Hills and Terre Bleue may also serve to corroborate claims made by critical theorists whereby education reinforces the status of an economic elite and perpetuates differences legitimised by certificates of educational achievement (Apple, 1982). The examples of 'ability privileging' corroborate the principles of structural analyses according to which the allocation of status and opportunity, to paraphrase Fuller (1991), are far more important than learning and the type of learning which actually occurs in classrooms.

Findings related to school processes and experiences stand in significant contrast to the ideals and principles of teaching, learning and socialisation presented in Chapter Two. The data showed that educational opportunity did not necessarily translate in actual

learning for all individuals and that the basic learning needs, as expressed in the *World Declaration for All* (1990), were not met for all pupils. In the *Convention on the Right of the Child* (1989) and the *Delors Report* (UNESCO, 1996), it is written that education should develop all children's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to their full potential. This remained very much an outsider's vision of schooling and education, a vision that had very little in common with the ways in which pupils in Four Hills and Terre Bleue were made to experience their primary education.

As mentioned earlier, individuals defined in this study as educationists were alone in construing the lack of active and participatory teaching and learning approaches as an important issue of Mauritian primary education. This finding will be discussed with other issues later in this chapter. Similarly, the disparity between processes and experiences at the school level, the Mauritian 'official' statement of the objectives of Mauritian primary education and the 'official' assessment of its strengths and weaknesses will be also discussed in the next sections of this chapter.

Data on classroom processes resolutely indicated that, in both schools, the focus remained steadfastly on teaching aimed at curriculum coverage and very little focus on higher order thinking and learning. Teachers imparted facts rather than stimulating and facilitating knowledge acquisition. These characteristics locate Mauritian instructional practices in the 'transition stage', a long way away from the problem solving and creativity which characterise the 'meaning stage' described by Lockheed and Verspoor (1991). The implications for this will also be discussed in the next sections of this chapter.

Data provided by children from Four Hills and Terre Bleue indicated that as a group, they experienced school as a place where they had friends, were exposed to the identical instructional practices discussed above and had to work hard. Data also revealed that pupils were fearful of teachers' discipline and experienced anxiety about getting their work right, about their performance at examinations and more particularly about the impending Certificate of Primary Education (CPE). Pictorial data specifically revealed some of the deeper experiences pupils had of classroom environments and activities. Pictorial representations of classroom from both older and younger pupils and from pupils of diverse abilities, for example, revealed that pupils strongly associated their being in classroom with physical and mental confinement, even imprisonment.

Observational data revealed resounding contrasts and polarities in the ways in which pupils experienced classroom activities (exemplified by the experiences of Anju and Shamlesh). The data indicated considerable differences between different 'types' of pupils with regard to the degree of their participation in class activities, the quality and frequency of their interactions with teachers and attention to tasks during class activities. Able pupils were active participants in class activities, more likely to interact with teachers and they paid more attention to their tasks. Their involvement was fully adapted to teachers' expectations. Less able pupils on the other hand engaged in what I described as 'cover-up' involvement, meaning that they behaved and acted in ways to remain unnoticed. The differential treatment given to the two less able pupils relegated at the back of a lower grade classroom (Chapter Seven) could in that sense serve as clear illustration that education prepares children for their place in society (Giroux, 1983), by socialising children to perceive their place in society.

The educational and other practices in place in Mauritian schools also nurtured docility in Mauritian children. This could perhaps serve to explain that pupils played their games in overcrowded and non-supervised playgrounds, without displaying any of the bullying and other aggressive behaviours I observed in school playgrounds of other countries.

### **Summary**

In contrast with prevailing conditions in the schools of many developing nations, in the study's two primary schools, Terre Bleue and Four Hills, pupils' experience was set in orderly and clean environments in which teachers maintained discipline, began lessons on time and let pupils know what was expected of them. As in many schools of developing nations, their learning experience was regulated by 'teacher-centered' instructional practices, in which material was presented in an orderly, systematic and uniform fashion and systematically passed on as information to class rather than to individual and diverse learners. Pupils engaged in common activities comprising chorus repeating, chorus reading and in written desk-work which teachers marked.

Pupils' learning activities were structured and controlled by teachers who were in possession and in control of the knowledge worth knowing, the knowledge with the potential to enable success at examinations and the CPE. Teachers were in charge of both its transmission and the sanctioning of its veracity. The extent of pupils' participation in learning activities was dependent. Teachers attuned and paced their teaching to the best able pupils and curriculum coverage. They concentrated their interactions with best able pupils. Their actions resulted in ability privileging and differential treatment of pupils in classroom situations.



In a redefinition of the three Rs, pupils' learning experience consisted of what I label recipient, repetition and recall learning rather than in active learning. Pupils engaged in solitary learning and were solicited only to contribute a right answer to class as a group. Questioning was the privilege of teachers rather than pupils' prerogative.

Pupils' experiences of their constructed classroom environment was uniform as well as polarised. Camaraderie with other pupils, but also to varying degrees, a sense of confinement, having to work hard and feelings of anxiety about their school-work gave uniformity to pupils' experience of primary education in class settings. The degree of participation in classroom activities, the quality and frequency of their interactions with teachers, the acceptability level of their performance polarised pupils' experience of primary education.

Actions and interactions in the class setting, as they have been discussed above, bring to the fore mechanisms and processes other than pedagogical as they were in place and at play in the classrooms of the two schools. Pupils were admittedly socialised to respect others but were not socialised to value team-work. They were taught to value hard work but not taught to value the ability to think, consider and constructively criticise, while through the processes of ability privileging, pupils learnt their place in society.

### **Research question two**

***What dominant features and practices frame and regulate pupils' experiences of primary education in classroom settings?***

### **Summary answer**

*Pupils were schooled in orderly and uniformly constructed classrooms environments. Their learning was regulated by 'teacher-centered' instructional practices and by having to master large amounts of factual and content knowledge. The quality, degree and frequency of their participation in class activities and of their interactions with teachers were regulated and sustained by 'ability privileging' and 'differential treatment' practices. Through these educational and non-educational practices, pupils were taught what knowledge was right or wrong, to value hard-work, to conform to the dictates of others as well as their place in society.*

As adults with some control and faced with children expected to conform, teachers seemed to wield much power in the ways in which pupils experienced primary education. As noted earlier the allocation of status and opportunity may be far more important than learning and the type of learning, which actually occurs in classrooms. Teachers' roles in that sense may very well be construed as agents of the state enabling its dictates. The data has shown that teachers were not alone in shaping pupils' experiences of primary education. Other factors were influential and are discussed in the next section.

### **Stakeholders' constructs (Research Question Three)**

In the previous sections I discussed what defined and characterised teachers, pupils, parents and educationists as stakeholders. I also discussed what framed and regulated school level and more particularly pupils' experience of primary education in classroom settings. In this third section, I propose an answer to research question three in which I asked what participant stakeholders construed as dominant issues of Mauritian primary

education. In order to answer this question, I summarise related findings presented in Chapters Six, Seven and more particularly Eight and discuss them in their broader contexts presented in Chapters Two and Five.

For most participants, the basic function of primary education is conceived in ways that echoed the statements of basic learning acquisition and outcomes outlined in the *World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990) and presented in Chapter Two.

Participants construed the acquiring of basic literacy and numeracy skills as a necessary and absolute minimum to function in life, to read their own mail, newspapers, count money, get a job and live in dignity. The latter was especially an issue for parents who themselves were not functionally literate. They associated literacy and numeracy with autonomy and a sense of worth and thus construed basic education as liberating.

Findings related to actions and interactions in class settings presented and discussed in the previous section, have shown that literacy, numeracy and reading skills were not or not likely to be achieved by **all** children. For educationists this problem was in great part due to the 'ability privileging' practice and 'teacher-centred' method described above, while teachers indicated that, having to cover the whole syllabus, they had no time to repeat lessons for slower pupils. Teachers saw pupils' difficulty or inability to assimilate what was taught in class as a contributive factor to their illiteracy rather than an outcome of their teaching methods and did not include 'ability privileging' practices in their explanation of the fact that some pupils left or would leave school without having acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills. Nor did they include the fact that children had to learn three languages and that the language of instruction was English rather than their mother tongue Creole in their explanations of the literacy problem.

Findings related to actions and interactions in class settings presented and discussed in the previous section have shown that, for teachers and parents, factual information in amount sufficient to pass or rank at examinations and more particularly the CPE, counted and was valued as the knowledge outcome of primary education. The 'subjects' English, French, EVS and Oriental Languages and also, even if to a lesser extent Mathematics, were all perceived as content which had to be assimilated, revised and memorised. For parents and teachers knowledge and skill tended to be equated with content and memory respectively. Educationists on the other hand, noted that, as factual and voluminous information, this knowledge became obsolete and forgotten once examinations had been taken.

Educationists pointed to the desirability of cognitive development rather than to the exclusive curriculum coverage and did so in ways that echoed international opinions, ideals and recommendations outlined in Chapter Two. For example, at issue for educationists was the fact that 'teacher-centered' and 'rote-learning' practices did not engage pupils in activities developing their creative, mental and physical potential, did not promote an all round development in which children would engage in higher order and problem solving learning and also develop their artistic and physical skills. Because these practices were not participatory and facilitative of these types of learning, they were not enabling pupils to become critical, adaptable, rational and practical, shortcomings which, according to educationists, made Mauritian children ill- equipped to fit in and contribute in the nation's fast modernisation.

Educationists' discourse indicated that their understanding of primary education was

attuned to international opinion presented in Chapter Two. In contrast with teachers, educationists had shifted their focus from teaching to learning and in contrast with teachers whose actions and view-points clearly indicated that they were functioning in what Marlaine Lockheed and Adriaan Verspoor (1991) labelled the 'formalist stage', were envisioning the 'meaning stage'.

Envisioning was an inherent characteristic of parents' understanding of primary education. For all, education was construed as a lever facilitating the achieving of the aspirations they had for their children, as an instrument determining the quality of the next experience, that is what kind of secondary education, if at all, their children were going to receive, leading to the achievement of a better destiny.

All parents aspired for a bright future for their children. For most, this aspiration was embedded in the fact that they had experienced poverty or relative poverty and, for most, it was fastened into a cultural disposition of wanting to improve 'one's lot'. This disposition, as explained by educationists, was deeply inscribed in Mauritian migrant and colonial past and people's desire, because of that past and the hardships many experienced as labourers in the sugar-cane fields, to work towards a better destiny. The context analysis presented in Chapter Five has shown that for a long time in Mauritian history, the occupational opportunities for working-class Mauritians were restricted to working in the sugar cane fields and the public sector. Education, as it became available and attainable, became the means to a way out of the sweat and toil of labouring in the cane fields and became the passport to secure a more propitious future in the public sector. Data revealed that this mentality/disposition for social mobility and the understanding of education as a means for that mobility had been carried over in

contemporary Mauritius and had gone several notches higher. In aspiring for a bright future and a better destiny for their children, all parents regarded secondary schooling as a necessity and desired that they become professionals, not have a job in the Mauritian export processing zone (EPZ).

Primary and secondary data indicated that, in Mauritius, young people had no real chance of securing social mobility and a better future if they did not secure a place in a 'good college'. As explained in Chapter Five, only 71 out of the 101 private secondary colleges in Mauritius counted in 1996 were considered 'good colleges' and pupils had to rank among the first 5000 among some 25,000 pupils at the CPE examination in order to school in one of those 71. Among these 71 secondary colleges a dozen of confessional and state colleges, which had been prestigious since colonial days, enjoyed a 'star college' status. Pupils had to rank among the first 500 among the 25,000 pupils at CPE in order to make the list compiled by the Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES) and secure a place in those. The remaining 60 secondary colleges which took pupils with a CPE pass rather than a CPE rank were considered sub-standard, some parents going to the extent of making their children repeat STD 6 in order to 'retry' for admission into a 'good college'.

Given parental aspiration and the particulars of provision of Mauritian secondary education, schooling in 'good colleges' was not perceived as an option. It was construed as a necessity, the means that would facilitate the achievement of the aspirations parents had for their children. Good and especially star colleges were considered to be better resourced, as having the best able pupils, the 'intellectual elite' as well as the best teachers, conditions which in a snow ball fashion, led students to achieve good results at

the SC and HSC, securing one of the limited places in Mauritius University or, even more importantly, obtaining scholarship for study overseas.

Given parental aspirations, the particulars of provision of secondary schooling and the competition for scarce places in 'good colleges' for parents and able pupils ranking was construed as the purpose of primary education and hard work the means to achieve that end. At issue for educationists was the reality that, given these circumstances, all pupils were subjected to a system and practices that favoured an able elite and were exposed to practices which promoted competition, cultivated individualism and instilled a sense of failure in the majority of children, (at the 1996 CPE, 5,698 pupils ranked, 10,931 pupils passed but did not rank and 8,892 did not pass).

All participants agreed that hard work was necessary given the competitive nature of the CPE examination and allocation of places in secondary schools. For pupils, arduous and voluminous work was experienced and construed as a necessity, as something they had to do in order to satisfy the demands made upon them by their teachers and by their parents, in order to get good marks and succeed at exams. Arduous and voluminous work was the pupils' end of the bargain, their responsibility for working out a better destiny for themselves. Parents' credence in the hard work they demanded from their children was fastened in their personal experience, the educational and professional rewards they themselves secured from their own hard work.

The curriculum was very heavily laden. It was to be examined in total and the CPE was competitive. For these reasons and also in response to pressures exercised by parents, teachers saw no other option than demanding hard work from their pupils and as

discussed earlier, to confine their teaching to examinable subjects. Under these circumstances and despite expressing some concern that a voluminous amount of work was required of children, teachers construed arduous work and voluminous work as necessities which in the end could or should benefit most of their pupils.

In contrast with teachers and parents, educationists' deliberations about hard work were made in relation to what they considered the immediate interests of children, rather than exclusively on aspects relating to their future. For educationists, hard work was too much work for young children and asking children to work so much was a practice they qualified with the word 'madness'. They, together with some teachers, pointed to some of the consequences, which the imposition of so much work had on young children, such as tiredness, mental stress, and an irreparable loss of childhood.

Given the fact that pupils had to memorise a massive amount of information for examination, parents and teachers were in no doubt that working hard was in their best interest, a sacrifice to be endured now for the good of the future. It is also manifest that children who did not or could not conform and respond to this demand had very little chance of educational success and prospects.

Data revealed strong concurrence among participants in seeing parental aspirations, a competitive examination and the lack of sufficient 'decent' colleges as contributing to place stakeholders' understanding of Mauritian primary education in a vicious circle. In addition, educationists acknowledged that teachers had much to gain financially from private tuition and this financial interest combined with parents' voracious ambition for their children, combined to make teachers and parents protractors of a status-quo with



regards to the expectation of much work from Mauritian primary school children. In incorporating demand and supply characteristics, the combined interest of parents and teachers may be understood as one of the fundamental reasons for sustaining a status-quo with regards to the expectation of much work from Mauritian children. As indicated earlier, teachers and parents saw no other options other than demanding and expecting hard work from children. In working hard enough children displayed their ability to achieve within an order perceived as meritocratic (Fuller, 1991) but which could also be construed as idiosyncratic and as serving interests other than theirs, or, as noted by an educationist, serving interests of theirs that are too far away.

### **Summary**

For parents and teachers, Mauritian primary education was construed as a means to an end, a credential enabling the achievement of personal aspirations rather than, as educationists would have wished, a process enabling children to learn the high-order, as well as basic knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to function and contribute to modern society.

This understanding of primary education was to a great extent regulated by a cultural disposition for social mobility and for valuing white-collar professional occupations. It was also controlled by the examination mechanism in place in the Mauritian primary education system, by the fact that there were not enough colleges perceived by concerned parties as 'good colleges'. Given these circumstances and priorities, pupils were expected to work hard, accumulate the information necessary to rank at the CPE examination which in turn and depending on their rank, would enable them to secure a place in a good college. At issue for educationists was the fact that the practices in place

in Mauritian primary schools did not engage pupils in activities developing their creative, mental and physical potentials, which they saw as shortcomings for individuals and the nation's development.

Participants likened Mauritian primary education to a vicious circle in which teachers had no option but to adopt practices befitting the assimilation of information in large amount in order to succeed at examinations and in which parents and teachers had no option but to impose hard work on children in order for them to secure a bright destiny, even if it did harm their present. While parents and teachers construed primary education and the hard work it involved as a step serving the future interest of children, educationists construed the practices and outcomes of primary education as detrimental to their future.

### **Research question three**

*What issues dominate and regulate participant stakeholders' understanding of Mauritian primary education?*

#### **Summary answer**

*Teachers, parents and pupils construed Mauritian primary education as a means to an end, a credential enabling the achievement of short and long term aspirations. Their understanding was regulated and sustained by a cultural disposition for individual social upgrading, examinational procedures and prerequisites which put pupils in competition to rank for a restricted number of 'good' secondary colleges. While acknowledging these issues, educationists pointed to the short and long term personal and national consequences brought about by the fact that primary*

*education did not provide basic skills to all children and did not enable their full development.*

The discussion has pointed to differences of perception among participant stakeholders of Mauritian primary education, especially between educationists and school participants. The reasons for these differences and how they combine and contrast with the 'official' vision of Mauritian primary education, as it has been outlined in Chapter Five, are discussed in the following section.

### **Contrasted understandings (Research Question Four)**

The discussion so far has outlined the dominant features, circumstances, practices, issues and priorities which framed, regulated and sustained participant stakeholders' experiences and understandings of Mauritian primary education. It has also outlined what differentiated participants as stakeholders able to contribute their experiences and understandings to the analysis of Mauritian primary education. In this section I bring together and discuss the contrasts which existed across and among Mauritian 'official' and other understandings of Mauritian primary education.

#### **Contrasts in stakeholders' understandings**

Findings discussed in the previous sections of this chapter have shown that participant stakeholders did not always concur in their understandings of what counted as useful knowledge and appropriate instructional practices in the Mauritian primary educational context.

Educationists and teachers rationalised the likelihood and degree of educational success

that pupils derived from primary education in dissimilar ways. Like teachers, educationists saw 'teachability factors' as important for determining both the likelihood and the degree of pupils' educational success. In contrast with them, they also saw 'ability privileging' practices and the 'teacher-centered' methods in place in Mauritian schools as stifling pupils' educational achievements.

The notion of what counted as useful knowledge was also construed differently by school level participants and educationists. For parents and teachers and because of the pressures discussed in previous sections, factual information and curriculum content counted as useful knowledge while in contrast, educationists valued cognitive, creative and physical development as useful knowledge.

These findings indicate that educationists saw pedagogical/processual factors as well as circumstantial factors as reasons serving to substantiate their criticism of the equity and quality issues of Mauritian primary education. Because of their awareness of the 'desirable' teaching methods and 'desirable' learning outcomes of primary education set at international conferences and international documents and described in Chapter Two, and because they sought the development of children rather than exclusively the obtaining of a credential, educationists, by comparison with other participants, may be viewed as having an expanded understanding of the specific equity and quality problems of Mauritian primary education. Their understanding of local circumstances together with their awareness of wider teaching and learning issues put educationists in a position to bridge a gap between international and local view-points. Their expanded pedagogical understanding of Mauritian primary education may on the other hand be seen as being in conflict with what other participant stakeholders perceive as the

immediate and future interest of Mauritian children, a notion which, as the following shows, was perceived differently by participants.

For teachers and parents, curriculum coverage, hard work and achieving a rank at the CPE examination were construed as the means serving and enabling the immediate and long-term personal interest of pupils, while for educationists and some teachers, too much work was construed as detrimental to pupils' immediate interests, their physical and mental well-being as well as their enjoyment of childhood. In contrast with teachers and parents who did not, educationists questioned the long term value of the knowledge, skills and attitudes imparted to pupils during their primary schooling. Their concerns were that children were not given the opportunity to develop the high order knowledge and skills necessary for a knowledge-based economy and necessary to fully function as citizens in a modern society. Their concerns were also that children were socialised as individualistic and competitive citizens and for the majority instilled with a sense of failure.

These findings also indicate a sharp contrast in the understanding of the short term and long term effects of primary education. Given circumstances and pressures and driven by aspirations for the long term, parents and teachers chose to value short-term credential outcomes of primary education. They were not aware or dismissed the short and long term consequences this position entailed. Educationists, on the other hand, because they were not under the same pressure and because they were differently informed, valued the short term and long term affective and cognitive outcomes of primary education.

Educationists' position of relative distance vis a vis primary education and the scope of their pedagogical understanding enabled them to differentiate between tangible/concrete versus ideal/abstract outcomes of Mauritian primary education and to differentiate aspects of education as they related to self-interest and the common good. These factors also led participant stakeholders to appreciate the fairness of the Mauritian primary education system in dissimilar ways. While educationists saw the way primary education was structured, delivered and sanctioned as favouring an 'intellectual elite', parents and pupils (under parental influence), sustained by their belief in hard work, construed primary education as meritocratic. Teachers, on the other hand, from their hands on position, saw primary education as both meritocratic and favouring an 'intellectual elite'.

#### **Contrasts between Mauritian 'official' and other Mauritian understandings**

Stakeholders' understandings of Mauritian primary education, as it has been discussed in the previous sections, were regulated by personal aspirations, experiences and issues. In contrast, the Mauritian 'official' discourse of primary education, as it has been presented in Chapter Five, outlined 'official' intent and appraisal of Mauritian primary education.

A prominent point made in the 'official' discourse as it has been outlined in Chapter Five, is the question of educational opportunity. In that same chapter I have shown that the social stratification in place in Mauritius during colonial administration was such that education was the privilege of a social elite and that its provision was segregated along ethnic and economic grounds. I have also shown that primary education for all became the political slogan in the mid-1940s and that the furthering of educational

opportunity for those formerly denied the opportunity to go to school became the priority of all Mauritian politicians ever since. Universal free primary education is an achievement featuring prominently in 'official' appraisal of Mauritian primary education.

The findings of this study revealed that educational opportunities, the provision of education for all pupils, did not necessarily result in similar educational learning opportunities for all pupils. As such, they brought a clearer as well as contrasted appreciation of the universality of that achievement. Practices such as 'ability privileging' and 'differential treatment' of pupils contributed to determine how much education, if at all, children derived from their schooling opportunities. As such, these findings challenge the notion that educational opportunity for all was achieved in Mauritius and indicate that a factual appreciation of educational learning opportunities for all children needs to go beyond the statistical reassurance of provision for all.

These findings also revealed that the notion of educational choice was an important issue for participant stakeholders especially for parents whose understanding of educational choice, even if unknowingly, corresponded with the statements made in article four of the *1960 Convention Against Discrimination in Education* which I have presented in Chapter Two. The findings of this research highlighted parents' desire for educational choice and in doing so provided a dimension into the understanding of educational opportunity not acknowledged in 'official' discourse. These findings also highlighted that self-interest and exertion in order to increase or maintain personal privileges were the mechanisms in place at the school level. On the other hand, mechanisms maintaining the status quo were operating at the official level.

A prominent point made in official discourse is a vision of education which promotes social harmony, plays a key role in the social development and "welfare of citizens", promotes "tolerance" and "mutual understanding" and helps in wiping out the "vestiges of prejudice" (MEAC, 1991).

The description of processes and experiences in school settings has shown that, just as they lived side by side and intermingled in shops, children from different ethnic religious and linguistic backgrounds schooled side by side without any sign of tensions in the same schools. These findings, however, indicated that there is a need to be more circumspect with the notion that primary education promotes mutual understanding and helps out in eliminating vestiges of social prejudice. Findings showed that pupils were separated in order to learn Oriental languages and catechism and that they learnt about their own culture rather than about that of others. They revealed that practices in place in classrooms because they promoted individualism and competition rather than cooperation and sharedness were not conducive to mutual understanding. They also revealed that, although all pupils, were enjoying free primary education regardless of creed, colour and gender, the practices I called 'ability privileging' and 'differential treatment' had become the current forms of prejudice. As such, these findings question the extent to which primary education promoted social harmony and helped in wiping out prejudice. They show that an appreciation of the degree to which primary education can play an active role in social harmonising and the degree to which pupils experience equality of treatment cannot be factual without an understanding of the educational practices and interactions in class and school settings.



A very prominent point in the 'official' discourse, as it has been presented in Chapter Five, is the assertion of a positive link between education and the economy. This emphasis started with the statement of education for all in the mid-1940s, in which it was stated that "a literate and intelligent population was the best guarantee of future economic wisdom" (Meade, 1968). Fifty years later, the opening statement with reference to education in the nation, in the *National Development Plan 1992-1994* stated that free education had enabled Mauritius to diversify into new economic activities (p.83).

In Chapter Five, I have shown that the 'official' discourse strongly emphasised a desire to bring schooling in line with the economy and adopted a visible 'human capital' vision of education. This vision for the late 1990s Mauritius called upon the educational system 'to foster a culture of creativity, develop initiative and nurture talent --all of which essential for Mauritius to maintain its competitive edge and thus guarantee sustained development' (*National Development Plan 1992-1994* p. 83).

The findings of this study revealed little concurrence between this vision of education and the reality of experiences and the understandings at the 'chalk face'. Educationists for example, voiced concern that educational practices in and outside classroom settings and for reasons already discussed bred docility and conformism rather than initiative and creativity while, like Anisha said, the country needed 'thinking heads' not 'arms and hands only' (P2).

In essence this vision concurred with that of educationists calling for the development of childrens' full potential. In essence it also corresponded with the call from

international opinion for educational systems having achieved educational provision to enter the 'meaning stage' (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991) of their educational development. The findings of this study clearly demonstrated that the latent goal of Mauritian primary education was to select a 'talented tenth' rather than educate all children. Findings demonstrated that if this vision was meant to be understood as a statement of intent, there existed a mismatch between official intent and the reality of practices and experiences at school level.

The 'official' intent of Mauritian primary education is outlined in the (1991) *Master Plan for Education*. The objectives of Mauritian primary education were:

- To provide a grounding in basic skills such as reading, writing and numeration and help to produce the linguistic capacity needed in a multi-lingual society;
- To encourage the child to observe, to think and to develop a sense of growing autonomy;
- To enable the child to develop values and attitudes relevant to the society in which he [sic] is growing up;
- To make him aware of his cultural roots and give him some appreciation of cultures other than his own and thus to contribute towards nation building.
- To help the child to develop his potential to the full;
- To develop a knowledge of healthy living and an appreciation of the natural environment (MEAC, 1991, p. 25).

Findings relating to practices in school and class settings provided a rich array of

information against which a clearer understanding of the contrast between intent and reality of primary education and schooling was gained. These findings revealed non-achievement or variations in the achieving of most of the objectives outlined above. Objectives one, two, three were not achieved by all, objective four was partially achieved by most pupils, while most pupils did not achieve objectives five and six. As such findings demonstrated a mismatch between official intent and the reality of practices and experiences at school level.

They also pointed to the educational and other practices and reasons for the non-or partial achievement of these objectives. Teachers' pedagogical knowledge and practices could not match and enable the achievement of all of these objectives. Teachers', parents' and pupils' priorities and interests were in contradiction with the priorities set out in some of these objectives. The examinational processes and selection prerequisites of the Mauritian educational system blocked the achievement of some of these objectives. A blatant 'ability privileging' and latent 'status-quo privileging' agenda came in the way of the achievement of some of these objectives.

### **Summary**

Contrasts across stakeholders' understandings of Mauritian primary education can be read as a polarisation of constructs with regards to what were or should be the outcomes of Mauritian primary education. Participant stakeholders differed in their interpretations of what counted as useful knowledge and their rationalisation of the reasons behind pupils' educational success and of the short and long term effects of primary education. While parents, teachers and pupils construed primary education as a credential, educationists construed primary education as a process that should have enabled the

creative, affective and cognitive development of pupils. Contrasts of understandings among participant stakeholders of Mauritian primary education were regulated by their position of closeness or relative distance vis a vis primary education, whether their understanding was sustained by self interest or not and was subject to pressure or not. They were also regulated by the scope of participant stakeholders' pedagogical knowledge and their appreciation of short term and long term benefits pupils derived, did not or will not derive from primary education.

Contrasts between 'official' and other understanding of Mauritian primary education on the other hand can be read as a polarisation between vision and reality, and intent and reality. 'Officials and stakeholders differed in their appreciation of educational opportunity which was construed as educational provision by the 'official' side while it was construed as both learning opportunity and educational choice by stakeholders.

There existed significant discrepancies between the 'official' appreciation/vision and stakeholders appreciation/experiences of: the degree to which primary education played a role in cultural harmonising; the degree to which pupils experienced equality of treatment in their primary schooling and the degree to which primary education instilled the knowledge, attitudes and skills essential to function and contribute in the Mauritian modernising economy.

There also existed a significant gap between official intent that is the objectives of Mauritian primary and the manifestation of these objectives at school level. Most of the objectives of primary education as they were stated in official documents were met only partially and only by a minority of children.

These divergences were regulated by contrasting interests. Self interest and exertion in order to increase or maintain personal privileges were the mechanisms in place at the school level. On the other hand, functional mechanisms maintaining the status-quo were operating at the official level. Like other understandings, they were also regulated by scope of pedagogical knowledge about primary education. They were also significantly regulated by the scope of knowledge of the practices and experiences of Mauritian primary education.

#### **Research question four**

*What are the contrasts between and across 'official' and other understandings of Mauritian primary education and what reasons underlie these contrasts?*

#### **Summary answer**

*Participants were polarised in their understanding of: what counted as useful primary education knowledge; the rationalisation of the reasons facilitating or impeding educational success and; an appreciation of the long term and short term affective and cognitive outcomes of primary education. The research findings demonstrated a significant mismatch between the 'official' vision and intended objectives for Mauritian primary education and the degree of their realisation at school level with regards to: educational opportunity, the degree to which primary education promoted and provided the appropriate attitudes, skills and knowledge for individuals as well as the social and economic good of the nation.*

*Divergences between and across 'official' and other understandings were regulated*

*and sustained by contrasting interests (self interest and status quo), scope of pedagogical knowledge, diverging appreciation of long term and short term benefits of primary education for children and the nation and by scope of school level knowledge of Mauritian primary education.*

## **A socio-cultural understanding of Mauritian primary education**

The research sought to answer the following question: *In what way is primary education conceived, experienced and articulated by various Mauritian stakeholders into priorities, issues and practices which combine to describe and extend an understanding of primary education in the Mauritian context?*

### **Summary answer to main research question**

*The research created an understanding of Mauritian primary education in context and in process that:*

- *Took participant stakeholders' diversity into account;*
- *Itemised teaching and learning procedures and interactions which characterised Mauritian pupil's experiences of primary education in class settings;*
- *Described and clarified the working of the features, circumstances, practices, issues and priorities which framed and regulated participant stakeholders' experiences and understandings of Mauritian primary education and;*
- *Outlined the polarisation between the intent and outcomes of Mauritian primary education.*

- *Participant stakeholders' diversity was characterised by:*
  1. *Degree and specificity of their personal and/or professional participation or non participation school level educational activities;*
  2. *Their position in terms of personal ability and/or professional standing;*
  3. *Their position in terms of privileges and handicaps;*
  4. *Scope of their cognizance of pedagogy;*
  5. *Scope of their cognizance of classroom educational and other practices;*
  6. *Their appreciation of long term and short term benefits of primary education;*
  7. *The specificity, strength and/or weakness of their aspirations and motives.*
  
- *Pupils' experiences in class settings took place in orderly and uniformly constructed classroom environments and were characterised by:*
  1. *Learning described as 'recipient' 'repetition' and 'recall';*
  2. *Participation in classroom activities and interactions with teachers framed and regulated by 'ability privileging' and 'differential treatment' practices;*
  3. *Valuing of hard work and conformity.*
  
- *Participant stakeholders construed Mauritian primary education as a means to an end, a credential enabling the achievement of a cultural aspiration for individual social upgrading, examinational procedures and prerequisites which put pupils in competition to rank for a restricted number of 'good' secondary colleges.*
  
- *Participant stakeholders were polarised in their understandings of:*
  1. *What counted as useful primary education knowledge;*
  2. *Appreciation of the short term and long term cognitive and affective outcomes of*

*current primary education;*

**3. Rationalisation of the reasons facilitating or impeding educational success.**

- *Divergences between and across 'official' and other understandings consisted of a mismatch between 'official' intended objectives and their realisation at school level with regards to:*

**1. Educational opportunity;**

- 2. The degree to which primary education promoted and provided the appropriate attitudes, skills, and knowledge for individuals and for the social and economic good of the nation.**

Having brought the research findings together and discussed them in light of the research question, the last task is to present the conclusions that may be drawn from this research. I do this in the next chapter where I show what can be learned from listening to and eliciting views from a broad range of people involved in education, the parents, the children, the teachers and the educationists and from understanding their actions in context and in process.



## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION

This research has shown how school level processes and the voices of participant stakeholders in Mauritius contributed to describe and extend the understanding of Mauritian primary education. A distinctive outcome of the research has been to depict Mauritian primary education in context and in process and to bring realism and visibility to the understanding of pedagogical processes, meanings and issues other than, and sometimes in contrast to, those officially portrayed. It has also demonstrated the inter-relationship among human, material and organisational facets and more particularly has highlighted peoples' experiences and perceptions in the understanding of Mauritian primary education. As such, the study suggests that much can be gained by eliciting views and listening to a broad range of people involved in education. The parents, the children, the teachers and the educationists all contributed information which can be useful for people seeking to improve the quality of Mauritian primary education for Mauritian children.

Another distinctive feature of this study is that it has exemplified an approach and methodology which produced rich and authentic accounts of the predominant processes and issues of Mauritian primary education. For these reasons, the study can also be taken to suggest that the socio-cultural approach and qualitative methods used in this research are suitable, relevant and may be replicated in order to seek and bring stakeholders' voices into the understanding of educational processes and issues in other countries, 'developing' or 'developed'.

## **Authenticity and replicability**

A major strength of this study is the depth and detail of the data gathered. This richness must, however, not be equated with breadth of scale. This study sought understanding of Mauritian primary education. From the findings of this study, other researchers are now able to build on and expand. The research has provided a limited rather than definitive understanding of Mauritian primary education. It is limited, in my view, by the ways in which I have conceptualised and designed the research and by the ways in which I have delineated which people could be construed as stakeholders of Mauritian primary education. Other conceptual approaches and combinations of stakeholders could have been devised. For these reasons I do not assume that the conceptual approach and decisions taken for this research are the only possible ones. It must also be made clear that the study is embedded in the cultural, historical and contemporary life of Mauritius. For these reasons, while I suggest that the findings can be taken to be pertinent to other similar Mauritian schools, they cannot be assumed to be appropriate for all schools in all developing countries.

Having stated these limitations, the research has a methodological basis that gives confidence in the findings as they stand. There are grounds for believing that I have presented an authentic account, at one point in time, of Mauritian participant stakeholders' experiences and view-points of Mauritian primary education, about the functioning of Mauritian primary education in two schools and about what participants construed as issues and priorities of Mauritian primary education. This confidence is based in part on the richness of the accounts and on the consistency between, within and across accounts. Consistency was found, for example, in the ways in which participants

from the two schools and from outside these schools concurred in their accounts of educational practices and issues of Mauritian primary education. Claims of authenticity, on the other hand, are supported by the associations that could be drawn between pupils', teachers' and parents' accounts of their experiences and understandings of Mauritian primary education.

An important aspect of this research was the creation of conditions which motivated participants to produce authentic accounts. I approached participants with respect and recognised their experience and view-points as valuable and useful in seeking to extend the understanding of Mauritian primary education. This focus on their ability to contribute, I believe, enabled participants to feel free and not be on the defensive. Participants found that their involvement in the research helped them to articulate the tacit knowledge underlying their experiences and understandings. This was underlined by the manifest enthusiasm most participants showed in their engagement with the study plus the fact that interviews were unconstrained and often exceeded the agreed times. These people rarely if ever, have been asked to give their opinion on educational processes.

Using the methods described in this study, it has been possible to gain access to the essence and rationale of Mauritian participant stakeholders' experiences and constructs of Mauritian primary education, to gain access to important school level issues and priorities of Mauritian primary education. As such, this research has exemplified a methodological approach which I suggest is suitable and relevant for seeking and collecting rich data about school processes and grass root perceptions in other countries. It has exemplified a methodological approach which I suggest is of use to those valuing

and seeking micro information in order to pursue a quality agenda for basic education in developing countries.

### **Contextuality, visibility and realism**

A distinct outcome of the research has been to show that a more encompassing understanding of educational processes can emerge when the complexity of views and perceptions of many stakeholders are sought and are described and analysed in context. The research has made visible diverse people, interests, ages, gender but also a wide range of perspectives (international and local). Through a socio-cultural approach it has provided an illustration of the interactions between diverse contexts (international, national, historical, institutional and personal), educational processes and the ways in which primary education was experienced by teachers and pupils.

A range of means of expression of these diverse perspectives was sought (observation, interview, stories and drawings). They gave participants the opportunity to contribute to the understanding of context. From children's drawings, for example, it was possible to get a vivid, detailed and visual understanding of what schools and classes 'looked like'. The depicted conditions in these drawings were tied to and necessary for explaining educational processes and for portraying children's sense of physical and mental confinement in classrooms. Childrens' drawings combined the elements of context, process and experience in one single image and as such were an appropriate and powerful medium to elicit the inter-relationship between context, practice and experiences of education.

Through the socio-cultural approach, the research has shown that context was constitutive of educational processes, experiences and issues and an essential component to the realistic interpretation of any of these aspects. It has located Mauritian primary education on a continuum in which Mauritian historical and cultural particulars, ( the broad context in the socio-cultural approach), formed the base upon which the present experiences and issues of Mauritian primary education, for example the favouring of an 'intellectual elite' were construed and could be understood.

Through the socio-cultural approach, the research has also demonstrated the importance and relevance of taking into account the personal life history and position of participants and how these aspects framed and influenced individual experiences and constructs of Mauritian primary education. The notions of 'life history' and 'position' for example helped us to understand the contrasts of experiences and perceptions between Devika and Lalita, between Anju and Shamlesh or Rama and Sarojni. They have also helped us understand stakeholders' diversity in terms of personal interest and knowledge.

Another significant outcome of the research has been to make visible the details of educational processes as they were experienced at the school level. The research provided detailed information on classroom environments where learning was regulated by teacher-centred pedagogical practices and consisted of the three R's which I redefined as recipient, repetition and recall learning, uncovered the practice of 'ability privileging' and clarified some of the reasons which underlie these practices. It revealed details on the nature, quality, degree and frequency of pupils' participation in class activities, of their interactions with teachers, of the ways in which they were categorised and how all these factors conditioned and led to contrasts in their personal experiences

of primary education. It revealed the details relating to the acceptability level of pupils' performance, the nature of what they were supposed to learn and value and the ways in which they were socialised. Such detailed information about educational processes may hold prospects for usefulness in the following areas:

- It provides an information basis for comparative educational research.

In combining macro-and micro-levels of analysis the study has created an understanding of Mauritian school processes which is detailed and at the same time deeply embedded in the national context and for these reasons useful to comparative researchers.

- It brings to light detailed information which enables locating Mauritian primary education within the framework of international ideals and principles and in ways that may be useful for assessing the connection between these international ideals and recommendations and the reality of school processes.

The research findings showed that verbal teaching, promoting and checking the memorisation of encyclopedic knowledge together with the categorisation and labelling of pupils were practices which, for example, stood in significant contrast to the ideals and principles of teaching, learning and socialisation valued by international opinion. This contrast constituted a significant problem in the eyes of educationists who, as a whole and in contrast with other participants, were strong advocates of international ideals and recommendations. I return to these contrasts later. The research provided an analysis of Mauritian school processes which pinpointed the discrepancies between school reality and international ideals. Knowledge of these discrepancies may inform,

but also be crucial, for adjusting and formulating policies designed and to facilitate the concretising of these ideals at the school level.

- It brings to light foundational information of educational processes which could prove useful for gauging the potential success or failure of educational change in Mauritius.

The data revealed, for example, that teaching practices were 'teacher centred', 'frontal' and 'authoritarian', that educational material was handed down to pupils and that individual inputs were encouraged and solicited only from pupils likely to provide the 'right answer'. In light of this information, the introduction of educational innovations requiring active learning, as appropriate are not likely to succeed without taking this information into consideration. I suggest that, in that sense, knowledge of educational practices may prove crucial for formulating policies designed to foster educational change with potential applicability at the school level.

- It brings to light information which could be useful for assessing matches and mismatches between 'official' statements and the realities of schooling at the school level.

Official statistics demonstrate that Mauritian children do go to school. However, the practices of 'ability privileging' and 'differential treatment' clearly demonstrated that statistical reassurance of provision of education for all could not factually translate as an achievement of 'education for all'. Descriptions of classroom processes provided the

means for this study to illustrate that most of the objectives for primary education outlined in 'official' statements were not achieved by some children. Some of these objectives, more specifically those expressing the desirability to develop children's potential to the full, were found to be in complete contradiction with what was happening at the school level. Children may attend school, this does not necessarily mean that they will be educated.

Research findings clearly demonstrated that knowledge of school processes help to compare intent against outcomes of education, help to show that intent cannot be mistaken for outcomes and to illustrate that stating intents is a beginning but does not necessarily translate into the desirable outcomes. The usefulness of such findings for policy formulation is conditioned by considerations well beyond the reach of the present study. The findings of this research, however, pointed to several notions that may be worth considering. For example, examination and selection prerequisites for further schooling in Mauritius were serious handicaps for the achievement of 'official' educational objectives. The explicit objectives were that each child will develop to his/her potential. The implicit objectives demonstrated that some children were more powerful than others. Those children considered bright or from 'privileged' families are helped to develop more than children having less potential. Given these circumstances, it is possible to imagine that educational objective statements would remain rhetorical without removing or altering the organisational conditions that make their achievement difficult or even impossible. Statements of educational objectives would also remain rhetorical should the covert 'official' intent of Mauritian primary schooling, as some findings suggest, be of perpetuating social privileges. In this scenario the mismatches between 'official' objective statement and outcomes in schools are indeed of little



significance.

### **Contextuality, visibility and “addressivity”**

Another significant outcome of the study has been to make visible the presence and inter-relationships of some of the multiple facets surrounding the “Certificate of Primary Education issue”, a major issue in the Mauritian primary education system. The research showed that the examination, taken by all children at the end of their primary cycle called CPE, exerted enormous pressure on teachers, parents and pupils and that, in Mauritius, as in many developing countries, this type of examination also exerted enormous influence on classroom teaching and learning activities.

The CPE had an overriding importance in the lives of participant stakeholders. The result of this test determined possibilities for further education, the quality of further education and the future prospects of Mauritian children at age 11. Having to pass this very competitive test at the end of the primary cycle meant workloads and work habits which took away the carefree, playful, creative and developmental side of pupils' childhood and significantly rubbed off on pedagogical practices (ie. valuing memorisation and right answer) and interactions (ie. ability privileging) in classrooms. As it had been in the past, the CPE examination was used as a powerful and efficient tool to select and sort people for a limited number of places in ‘good colleges’. It was used as a useful mechanism to determine the allocation of status and opportunity, a mechanism which appeared far more important than assessing real cognitive outcomes.

The research has demonstrated that the "CPE issue" needs to be understood in its historical, cultural and institutional settings. These aspects are inter-linked and aware of each other and that in analysing this particular issue, I was able to demonstrate some working of the theoretical tools of "situatedness" and "addressivity" utilised to conceptualise the research. With practicality in mind, as the following examples show it is also possible to suggest that, without taking these human, organisational, cultural, historical, pedagogical and political inter-related facets of education into account, educational innovations run the risk of not yielding the desired effect. I suggest that given the vigour of their aspirations, any reform perceived by parents as running against their desire for 'decent' secondary education for their children, would have very little chance of success with a continuing shortage of what they consider 'good colleges' and whilst the CPE remains a selection test. Furthermore, in knowing that teachers teach to test, it is also possible to suggest that talk about introducing more active learning where pupils could develop critical and creative skills would seem futile since the testing system is designed to assess the opposite. In supposing that CPE tests were designed to include generative, creative and problem solving thinking rather than memory it is possible to imagine that, given the fact that they want children to perform well, teachers and parents would spend time on developing these skills.

The issue of the CPE is one example illustrating the workings of the socio-cultural approach adopted for the study, for example the workings of the tenets of "voices" and "addressivity" in that approach. The research has clearly demonstrated the linked nature of all aspects of Mauritian primary education, how the actions of some participants influence those of others. It has illustrated that "voices" and "actions" not only exist in their social, institutional and personal contexts but that they are aware of and dependent

on each other.

In light of the findings presented in this study it is clear that reform, if it is to be successful, cannot remain fragmentary but must take the inter-dependency of these voices and actions, and more particularly those found at the school level, into account.

## **Humanization**

The most convincing and promising outcome of this research has been to bring the human dimension to the fore. The conceptualising and designing of the study around the concepts of "action", "voices" and "situatedness" made it possible to create an account and generate an understanding of Mauritian primary education that showed people in action as individuals with a name, a life story, a culture, a particular position, interest and power.

In communicating the varied and sometimes conflicting priorities, beliefs and interests of pupils, parents, teachers and educationists, their diverse status, position, involvement, advantages, handicaps, abilities and knowledge, the research has demonstrated that it is through a respectful listening to and recognition of the diverse participants involved in primary education that a social construction of primary education can be understood and achieved.

An important outcome of this study has been to make children visible. In doing so the research has created an understanding of what children did with their educational time and more pointedly it has created a clearer picture of how they experienced their schooling. It has illustrated their hopes, achievements, difficulties, their strength and

their fragility. The research has shown that because parents and teachers focussed on outcomes rather than processes of primary education and with the looming threat of the CPE, children experienced grueling workloads and an educational experience limited to the assimilation of large amounts of factual content knowledge. It has also illustrated teachers' general tendency to favour more able pupils and overlook less able pupils. Children are at the centre of primary education. This research has shown that in many ways, there needs to be a concerted collaborative approach by parents, teachers, pupils, educationists and policy makers to make children and their development the focus of education. In providing an account of children's experience, the research has shown that in many ways both the educational system and adults did not necessarily hold that view. As such the research serves to remind that one way of looking at education is to see it as a developmental undertaking that should serve childrens' immediate as well as future interest.

The ultimate outcome of the research is that it has given a voice to people whose voice had not yet been heard in analysis of primary education in Mauritius. Much has been heard in listening to these voices and much is still to be heard. Nevertheless, this outcome could be of practical value to those who guide policy on primary education in Mauritius.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO SCHOOLS



*Mauritius Institute of Education*

Reduit — Mauritius — Tel.: 454-1031-36

Fax: (230) 454-1037

Your Ref:

Date: 14 November 1995

Our Ref:

Dear Mr


Research in Primary Education

As I told you over the telephone today, Mrs Michèle Griffith is intending to do research in primary education in Mauritius for a PhD.

I shall be most grateful if you could allow her access to classes next year so that she can carry on her work.

With my thanks.

Yours sincerely

  
D Dyall (Mrs)  
TCP Course Coordinator

**UNESCO CHAIR  
MAURITIUS INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION**

REDUIT, MAURITIUS: TEL: 465-4823: FAX: 230-465-4823

To Whom It May Concern

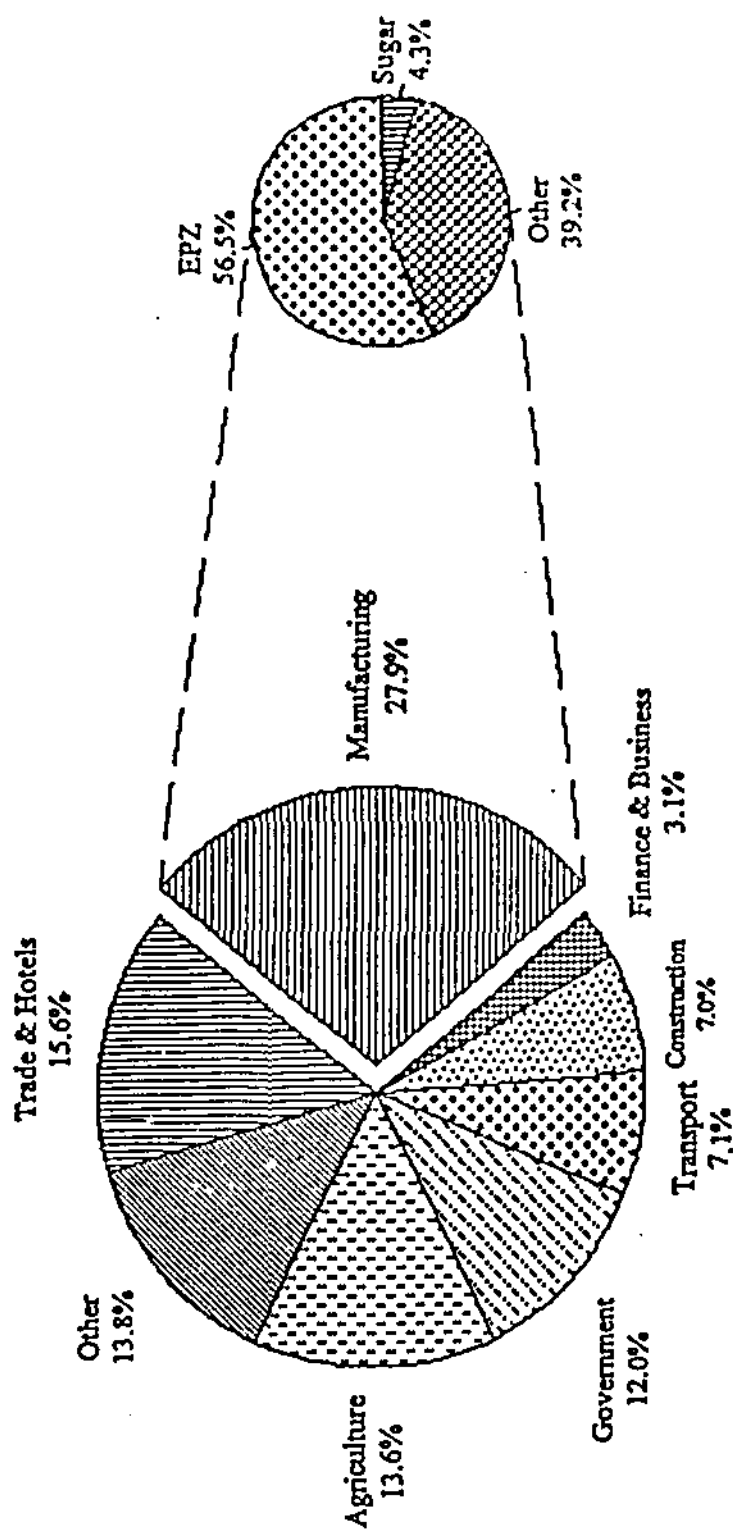
This letter is to introduce Michelle Griffiths from Edith Cowan University in Australia. Ms. Griffiths is in Mauritius conducting research for her PhD in education under my supervision. Her study concerns primary education in the Nation. In the past month she has been working closely with primary schools and teachers. As part of her study, Ms. Griffiths will be interviewing a number of people in Mauritius to solicit their views on the priorities and challenges of primary education, both within the Mauritian context and broad international trends. I have recommended that Ms. Griffiths contact and arrange for a short interview with you. All interviews are strictly confidential and no individual attribution, of any kind, will appear in the final study. I trust that you will be able to provide Ms. Griffiths some of your time and to share your views with her. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours truly



Dr. T.R. Morrison

FIGURE 2: EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY IN MAURITIUS IN 1995



Source: MEPS (1997c). *Labour Force, Employment and unemployment 1996*. Port Louis: Central Statistical Office.

# APPENDIX D

TABLE 13: POPULATION, PLACES OF WORSHIP AND SCHOOLS IN MAURITIUS IN 1835

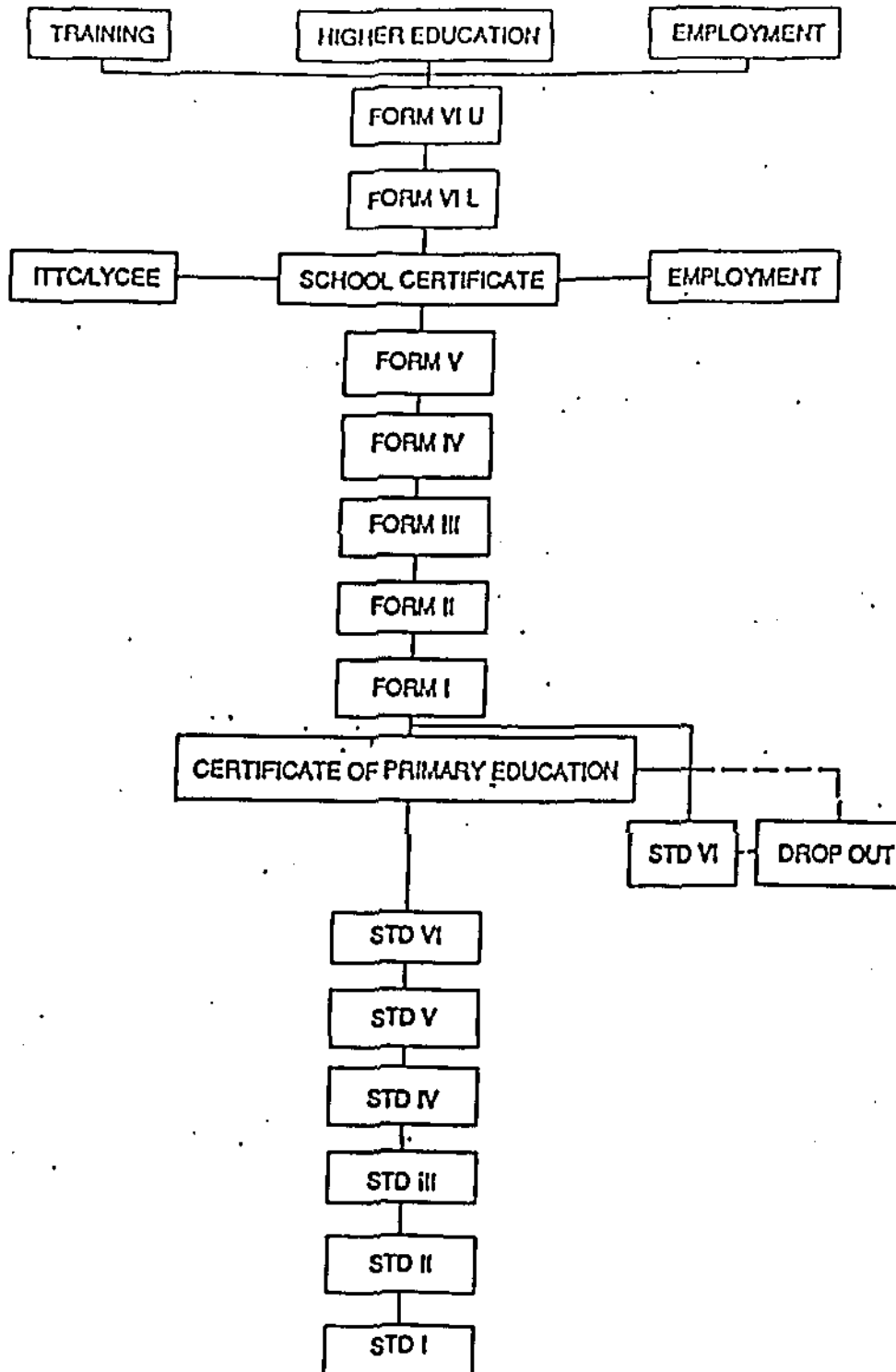
A STATEMENT of the Moral and Religious Condition of the FREE and SLAVE POPULATION at MAURITIUS; the Districts into which the Island is divided; the Population, Places of Worship, and Schools in each District, &c., &c. Drawn up from a Communication made, in March 1835, by the REV. JEAN LE BRUN, British Missionary, Mauritius, to R. H. THOMAS, Esq., late Protector of Slaves in that Colony.

District	Population			Places of Worship. (Protestant and Catholic)	No. of Attend- ance. (About)	Schools. (Protestant.)	No. of Attend- ance.	No of Protestant Clergymen.	Their Duties.
	Free.	Appren- tices.	Total.						
PORT LOUIS ... ..	10,900	14,700	25,600	One Catholic Church. One Episcopal English. One Missionary School- room, attended by free people of colour.	700 400 200	One Government School for both Sexes, (about) One Boy's Day School, attended by { Free 80 Slaves 40 }	100  120	Mr Denny ... .. Mr Banks ... .. Mr Jones ... .. Mr Le Brun ... ..	Civil Chaplain. Second Civil Chaplain. Chaplain to the Forces. Protestant Missionary.
PAMPLEMOUSSE ... ..	2,322	10,000	12,232	One Catholic Church.	400	One for both Sexes.	40		
RIVIÈRE DU REMPART	2,000	10,000	12,000	One Small Chapel built by Voluntary-Sub- scriptions.	150	One for both Sexes	38		
GRAND PORT ... ..	2,000	6,700	8,700	None.	—	None.	—		
FLACQ ... ..	2,499	9,397	11,896	One Catholic Church.	400	None.	—		
SAYANNA ... ..	600	5,200	5,800	None.	—	None.	—		
BLACK RIVER ... ..	800	5,397	6,197	None.	—	None.	—		
PLAIN WILHELME ... ..	1,200	6,677	7,877	None.	—	None.	—		
NOKA ... ..	800	2,800	3,600	One Catholic Chapel.	400	None.	—		
	21,121	70,871	91,992	Catholic 4 Protestant 3 } -7	2,650	Four Schools.	298		

Source: Randoyal, R. (1977) *The development of education in Mauritius*. Reduit: MHE, (pp.54-55).

## APPENDIX E

FIGURE 4: THE STRUCTURE OF THE MAURITIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM



Source: MEAC (1991). *Master Plan for Education*. Port Louis : Mauritius Ministry of Education Arts and Culture. p.15.